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# Twentieth Century

A SCHOLARLY AND CRITICAL JOURNAL



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*Twentieth Century Literature*, (ISSN 0041-462X), published four times a year by HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY PRESS, Hempstead, New York 11550, considers manuscripts on all aspects of modern and contemporary literature, including articles in English on writers in other languages. It is indexed in *Humanities Index*, *Bibliographic Index*, the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, and other standard sources. Subscription rates: Domestic, \$20.00 a year to individual subscribers, \$24.00 a year to Institutions; foreign, \$24.00 a year to individual subscribers, \$28.00 a year to Institutions. Single copies: \$7.00 plus \$1.00 for foreign orders. Back issues available from Kraus Reprint Co., University Microfilms, Inc., and Johnson Associates, Inc. (microfiche). Second-class postage paid at Albany, New York. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49 Sheridan Ave., Albany, New York 12210. Copyright 1986, Hofstra University Press. Manuscripts conforming to the *MLA Style Sheet* (2d ed., 1970) should be directed to WILLIAM MCBRIE, Editor, *Twentieth Century Literature*, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY, Hempstead, New York 11550. Send change of address and subscriptions to: *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49 Sheridan Ave., Albany, New York 12210.

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We record with sorrow the death of Bernard Beckerman, professor of English at Columbia University, to whom we dedicate this number of *Twentieth Century Literature*. Bernie was a member of the Editorial Board of *TCL* since 1974. Like those everywhere who worked with Bernie, we shall miss his rare combination of sweetness and erudition and the generosity with which he lent his attention to the journal and its concerns. If there is any consolation for his sudden death, it is in the fullness of his life which we at *TCL* shared. We would like to have known him longer.

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Photo of Zulfikar Ghose by Helena De la Fontaine

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PAUL BOWLES ISSUE

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# Andromeda Unbound: Gender and Genre in Millay's Sonnets

*Winner of the 1986 TCL Prize in Literary Criticism*

DEBRA FRIED

In a critical climate in which we are rediscovering the powerful experiments of American women poets in the modernist era, the tidy verses of Edna St. Vincent Millay have remained something of an embarrassment. Tough-minded as they can be about sex, betrayal, and the price of being a woman who can write candidly about such matters, Millay's poems, particularly her sonnets, can often seem like retrograde schoolgirl exercises amidst the vanguard verbal dazzle of H. D., Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, and Marianne Moore. In revising the history of modernism to make more central the achievements of these innovative poets, it has been convenient to dismiss Millay's work as copybook bohemianism. Millay may rightly be judged as a minor star in this constellation, but this is not, I think, why there have been so few serious investigations of Millay of late. Our silence attests rather to a failure to ask the right questions about how traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet may serve the needs of women poets.<sup>1</sup> Why does a woman poet in this century elect to write sonnets? What sort of gender associations can a poetic form such as the sonnet accumulate, and how may such associations, and consequent exclusions, make that genre an especially lively arena for the revisionary acts of women's poetry? What model of the relation between generic restraints and expressive freedom is suggested by the sonnet? How does genre shape the meanings of allusion within a sonnet, particularly allusions to other sonnets? And, most centrally for thinking about Millay, how has the sonnet historically implied connections between formal (generic, metrical, rhetorical) constraints and sexual ones?

Instead of asking such questions, we have tended to assume that we

know just how and why a poet like Millay must use circumscribed, traditional poetic forms: to rein in her strong, unruly feelings. This idea is a commonplace in earlier writing on the poet, as in Jean Gould's observation in her popular biography that Millay "found security in classical form: the sonnet was the golden scepter with which she ruled her poetic passions."<sup>2</sup> We can find similar claims in two recent essays on Millay's poetry. Jane Stanbrough caps a persuasive analysis of the deep sense of submission and constriction that lies behind Millay's seemingly defiant, unharnessed poetry with the observation that Millay's sonnets and sonnet sequences illustrate her tendency to "resort to the constraints of traditional verse form":

The sonnet, her best form, is a fit vehicle to convey her deepest feelings of woman's victimization. Through it, Millay imaginatively reenacts her constant struggle against boundaries. The wish for freedom is always qualified by the sense of restriction; couplets and quatrains suit her sensibility.<sup>3</sup>

This claim, sensible as it sounds, calls for considerable scrutiny. What poetic "sensibility," we may ask, is not in some degree suited to the strictures of poetic form? (Isn't that what it would mean to have a poetic sensibility?) The identification of sonnets with a creative temperament that both needs boundaries and needs to strain against them is by no means applicable exclusively to Millay or to women poets. Too many assumptions go untested in Stanbrough's implication that in Millay's dependence on poetic constraints to embody the drama of vulnerability and resistance we witness a particularly female response to lyric form. A full declaration of those assumptions would require an inquiry into the ways a potentially stifling poetic form may amplify—give pitch, density, and strength to—a poet's voice. If we are to isolate the particular resources, if any, with which a woman poet may rebel against formal constraints, we must begin with an examination of the tropes for the sonnet that are part of the history of that genre. Only then can we determine the particular uses a woman poet can make of the liberating fetters of the sonnet form. The power of Millay's sonnets, and their usefulness for the study of the relations between gender and genre in twentieth-century poetry, derives from the readiness with which, while working within formal boundaries, they challenge the figurations for which the sonnet has been traditionally a receptive home. Through her revisions of those tropes and related devices—particularly as found in sonnets of Wordsworth and Keats—Millay's allusive sonnets, I will contend, reclaim that genre as her plot of ground, not chiefly by planting it with "woman's" themes or using it as mouthpiece for the

woman's voice (though she does both these things), but by rethinking the form's historical capacity for silencing her voice.

It is this kind of reflectiveness about what it means to work within traditional forms that another recent essay would seem to deny to Millay. In a study of the Elizabethan sonnets of Millay and Elinor Wylie, Judith Farr argues that Millay's particular temperaments, attitudes, and skills sometimes led her to

marshall against the lively but serene mathematics of contained forms like the sonnet, quatrain, or couplet a battery of dissheveled impulses expressed in terms calculated to shock. . . . Millay's best work exhibits a tutored sensibility that enabled her to compose effectively within literary traditions she respected. The Petrarchan conventions to which she submitted in *Fatal Interview* served her well, moreover, disciplining her imagination yet encouraging the emotional scope her poetry instinctively sought.<sup>4</sup>

One may readily take Farr's point that all of Millay's efforts in the Elizabethan mode are not equally successful. More questionable is the assumption here that the poet Millay is a creature of raw emotion or instinct who, when she is good, submits to a form that will tame that rawness, and when she is bad, invades the decorous parlors of poetic form like a spoiled child with her mad manners. The language of power in this passage from Farr's essay is also tellingly confused: the process whereby conventions to which the poet "submits" may then in turn submit to or "serve" her is a complicated one that needs to be explained and argued in specific instances. To assume, as Farr would appear to do, that in choosing "contained forms" Millay either bombards them with mischievous, whimsical "impulses" (are these the same as the "emotional scope her poetry instinctively sought"?") or submissively "composes" within them lest impulse get the better of her, is to imply that Millay worked unwittingly at the mercy of these opposed moods. But the question of whether writing in an established lyric genre is an act of taking command or of being commanded is one upon which Millay's sonnets reflect.

It is, moreover, a reflection to which Millay found the sonnet is supremely suited, in part because it is a subject explored in the English Romantic sonnets Millay knew well. One of the dubious things about Stanbrough's and Farr's accounts of why Millay found the sonnet suited to her poetic needs is that they so strikingly resemble Wordsworth's claim that he turned to the sonnet to find relief from "too much

liberty." The sonnet is such a difficult form that from its inception in English it took as one of its topics the paradoxical release and scope to be derived from its intricate formal requirements. Stanbrough's remark that through the sonnet Millay "imaginatively reenacts her constant struggle against boundaries" is best scrutinized by setting it beside Wordsworth's "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room."

Although it is well known, we will need to look at the poem in some detail.

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room,  
 And hermits are contented with their cells,  
 And students with their pensive citadels;  
 Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,  
 Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom,  
 High as the highest Peak of Furness-Fells,  
 Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells:  
 In truth the prison, unto which we doom  
 Ourselves, no prison is: and hence for me,  
 In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound  
 Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground;  
 Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)  
 Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,  
 Should find brief solace there, as I have found.<sup>5</sup>

Through a series of analogies Wordsworth builds his argument that the sonnet is chosen less as a vehicle for expression than as a rest cure from the expansiveness of other expressive tasks. The poet turns to the sonnet for release from what he calls "the weight of too much liberty," bolstering his claims for the contentment this brief form can yield by adducing the figures of the nun, hermit, student, spinning maids, and weavers—all willingly enclosed in cells of work or thought. Yet it is precisely because he does not have the limited vocational contentment these figures enjoy that he requires the "brief solace" of a binding poetic form analogous in its "scanty plot" to their productive enclosures. They inhabit these containments willingly as the natural space for their labors, while the poet rather seeks such containment as a cure for a temporarily unsatisfying wildness. The nun is content in her "convent's narrow room" not because there she finds relief from too much liberty; the hermit, male counterpart of the nun, is hardly to be read as a libertine curing himself through isolation and self-imprisonment. In this sense the sonnet's analogies are rather startlingly inexact. When sought as cure for a dangerous freedom, the narrow room of poetic convention seems only faintly comparable to the nun's convent.

There is something deceptive, then, in Wordsworth's catalog of

contented prisoners who help him to defend his free generic choice of the sonnet's prison house. This deception is hinted at in the shift to the culminating example of the soaring bees who willingly enclose themselves in "foxglove bells." The shift from individual human workers to generalized, plural creatures of nature, it might be argued, deftly clinches the proof by finding the principle of chosen enclosure in the tiniest phenomena and at the farthest geographical margins. In this sense we might suppose that in lines 5–7 the sonnet soars beyond the neatly allocated, gendered world of the opening lines. Yet this turn to the bees also hints at a felt inadequacy in the poem's preceding examples. The bees' erotic labor of entering and fertilizing flowers is out of tune with the opening catalog of closeted celibates and plyers of cottage industries, each sex performing its own labor by itself. The murmuring bees are more like the poet Wordsworth than like any of these pensive workers. Both bees and poet can choose enclosure because they are privileged to be creatures of "sundry moods." Promiscuous, musical, and free, the bees enjoy a specifically male power of voice that is beautifully muted and sustained by the delights of enclosure.

Unlike the paired figures of nun and hermit, maids and weaver, the bees would seem to have no corresponding female; but we might locate their partners in the foxglove bells they fertilize and in which they "murmur." If the flowers play the female in this natural coupling, it becomes clearer that the attribution of musical powers to the "foxglove bells" is somewhat deceptive, as they are so called in reference to their bell-like shape, while they are made musical only by the bees' murmuring penetration of them.<sup>6</sup> The culminating example of the bees frets against the others. The mismatch between the free-ranging bees and the preceding figures of happy enclosure allows us to detect the gendered associations of the sonnet form. If the sonnet is historically associated with a liberating, because voluntary, constriction, such solace is implicitly the privilege of the sex that may choose as well to be free.

If we take "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room" as exemplifying a masculine poetics of the sonnet in the Romantic period, we find a divided allegiance in the claims that the poet frees himself by binding himself. The poet seeks through the writing of the sonnet the self-enclosed sense of vocation of the nun or hermit, but by cataloging these cloistered votaries to exemplify the poetic solace the sonnet can afford, he refuses to admit that this is a solace necessitated by a burdensome freedom they are not privileged to suffer. The image of the bees upsets the sonnet's opening symmetries, its series of pairings

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suggesting that male and female alike find solace in enclosure. It thereby prompts us to be skeptical about whether both sexes can be equally oppressed by “the weight of too much liberty” and can turn with the same relief to the sonnet’s “scanty plot of ground.” Confined by their sex in a scanty plot—small room to travel and small room to change the narrative of their lives, already plotted for them as the sex that stays enclosed at home—women poets, even the “new woman” of modernism that Millay was taken to typify, cannot enjoy quite this brand of Wordsworthian solace in putting on the corset of strict lyric form.

The question of whether the sonnet’s delights of enclosure are unavailable to women becomes more vexed when we remember that the excess of liberty which the sonnet was to cure was, in Wordsworth’s case, the freedom to write epic. In the course of writing *The Prelude*, Wordsworth learned that he needed literary strictures to counterbalance the weighty responsibility of the epic’s relatively unlimited options. The sonnet’s poetics of refuge serves the post-Miltonic epic poet as ballast to his vaunted, or, to cite another Wordsworthian trope of sonnet as enclosed space, as “little cells, oratories, or sepulchral recesses” in the “gothic church” to which he compared his projected great epic, *The Recluse*.<sup>7</sup> This figuration of the sonnet as a deliberately constricting antechamber to the grand edifice of bardic achievement arguably excludes the woman poet from the structure entirely. For her it is not “pastime to be bound” in the sonnet’s restricted scope as respite from the effort of epic soaring. No one seriously expects her to undertake the epic, national or personal; her sonnets are not taken to be preparatory gestures for or lyric retreats from the longer, loftier genres. The entire notion of the Virgilian career from the simple, parochial modes like pastoral and georgic to the grand, public scope of epic implies a male bard at work refining the language of his race. The woman may be his muse, but she can never follow him up the graded ladder of poetic modes. The woman poet is not blessed with his mobility, a mobility which can become a burdensome independence sending the male poet to the comforting fold of the patterns of brief lyric forms. Thus her choice of the sonnet cannot mean the same thing as his.

If it is true, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest, that “verse genres have been even more thoroughly male than fictional ones,” it is so in part because verse genres are traditionally more subject to hierarchical ranking than fictional ones.<sup>8</sup> Only by acknowledging the woman writer’s exclusion from this hierarchy of verse genres can we

begin to understand what a woman poet may signify when she chooses to write sonnets. But first we must look more closely at what the male poet's choice entails.

For Wordsworth, the place of the sonnet in the hierarchy of poetic genres is clearly marked in the career of Milton. By modeling his sonnets on Milton's, Wordsworth attempts to reinforce the status of his sonnets as overtures to epic promise or breathers from epic responsibilities. He praised in particular Milton's tendency to loosen the binds of the form by working against the traditional units within the sonnet. In Milton's best sonnets, Wordsworth notes,

the sense does not close with the rhyme, at the eighth line, but overflows into the second portion of the metre. Now it has struck me, that this is not done merely to gratify the ear of variety and freedom of sound, but also to aid in giving that pervading sense of intense Unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me mainly to consist.<sup>9</sup>

Wordsworth admires the way Milton's sonnets do not submit to the Italian octet-sestet division, but rather fret at the barriers of rhyme, so that, in John Hollander's phrase, "the rhymes do not force logical and rhetorical units."<sup>10</sup> Enjambment serves to deemphasize the traditional units established by the rhyme scheme and thus gives the sonnet the feel of a fluid, rounded period. Milton loosens the sonnet's regimentation so that within this constricting form he may approximate the freedom of blank verse—the freedom, that is, that he would enjoy most thoroughly in the epic for which his sonnets are a training ground. "Nuns Fret Not" provides a good example of how Wordsworth takes Miltonic freedoms with the sonnet. By permitting the octet to push its way into the ninth line and thus delay the turn of the sonnet by a half-line (to cite just one characteristically Miltonic touch), Wordsworth empowers this single technical choice to engage his work with the tradition of Miltonic writing—not just with Milton's sonnets, but with the epic ambitions in which the sonnets find an important but decidedly secondary place.

The question that then arises is whether a woman poet whose sonnets displayed comparable virtues of flexibility, variety, and freedom could accrue to herself the Miltonic ambitions with which Wordsworth can associate himself in his sonnets. If the woman poet is exiled so sternly from this tradition that she is not privileged to charge the prosodic nuances of a traditional lyric genre with the force of male literary history, the very resources by which poetic form can mean at all are thus curtailed for her.

Edna St. Vincent Millay found herself in what was perhaps a unique position in the history of women writing poetry; she was called upon to uphold the tradition of binding lyric forms against the onslaught of what her supporters saw as a dangerously shapeless modernism. In 1917 the prodigious schoolgirl who wrote "Renascence" represented "an alternative to the 'new' poetry . . . whose work could serve as a rallying point for the rejection of free verse, imagism, and Prufrockian ennui."<sup>11</sup> At the same time Millay was identified with the bohemian literary life of Greenwich Village, seen as a kind of poetic flapper who, as Elizabeth Atkins put it in 1936, "represents our time to itself."<sup>12</sup> It was, in short, an interesting time for a woman to be writing sonnets. The issues of poetic and sexual freedom were being explicitly linked; why should free-spirited Millay stick to the sonnet when other women poets were experimenting with free verse? It would be easy to suspect the poet of merely posturing at promiscuity, aping a man's freedom in order to earn the respite of poetic formalism on a man's ground. But for her the sonnet's formal patterns and its brevity both come to figure the price of freedom rather than a welcome retreat from it.

To the degree that Millay identifies the working of the sonnet with the poetics of the bohemian life, she rejects the Wordsworthian figuration of the sonnet as controlled respite from freedom. The self-fulfilling prophecies of the sonnet's tight formalities—the set of interlocking rules and obligations any sonnet sets itself early on and its "metrical contract," in Hollander's terms, not to waver from it—Millay found useful as a trope for a poetics of burning one's candle at both ends, of using one's life up completely. The sonnet can embody metrically, sonorously, and syntactically a kind of perfectly efficient hedonism, culminating in a closure with no residue. The sestet of "Thou famished grave, I will not fill thee yet" from *Huntsman, What Quarry?* defiantly tells Death how lives and poems are to be ended:

I cannot starve thee out: I am thy prey  
 And thou shalt have me; but I dare defend  
 That I can stave thee off; and I dare say,  
 What with the life I lead, the force I spend,  
 I'll be but bones and jewels on that day,  
 And leave thee hungry even in the end.

The poet "staves off" death by the achieved design of her stanzas. Here the sonnet's closure—completing its metrical and rhyming requirements, leaving nothing formally unsatisfied, filling its staves—mimes the way the poet vows to use up her force completely and leave nothing

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behind. Millay allows her life to end with no residue of unlived days, as the completed sonnet, ending "in the end," permits no residue of unpaired rhymes, unbalanced argument, or dangling syntax. Not a matter of wanton wastefulness but of almost methodical, tasking exhaustiveness, the bohemian project is thus aptly figured in the seemingly opposite, straitlacing, vow-keeping, binding contract any sonnet must be. Recalling Farr's charge that Millay "marshall[s] against the lively but serene mathematics of contained forms like the sonnet, quatrain, or couplet a battery of dissheveled impulses," we might rather say that the self-fulfilling equations of poetic forms provide the formula whereby Millay makes sure that those impulses play themselves out to the full.

All this insistence on the scrupulous hard work of being liberated suggests the occupational hazards this job has for women. For them, the weight of too much liberty too often can be translated into a demanding lover's "weight upon my breast" ("I, being born a woman and distressed" from *The Harp-Weaver*). Free love itself can be a prison. Dazzled by the sight of her lover, the speaker of "When I too long have looked upon your face" (*Second April*) compares her condition, when she "turn[s] away reluctant" from his "light," to a very scanty plot of ground indeed:

Then is my daily life a narrow room  
In which a little while, uncertainly,  
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,  
Among familiar things grown strange to me  
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,  
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

The new woman may fret a great deal in her freedom's "narrow room," it seems; and we may take Millay's soft but audible allusion to the opening line of "Nuns Fret Not" as a reflection on the different kinds of narrowness to which their own freedom may condemn men and women. The enclosing solace of the Wordsworthian sonnet becomes here an almost tomblike, if chosen, claustrophobia, a prison into which the woman dooms herself when she turns away, a "silly, dazzled thing deprived of sight," from the overpowering brilliance of her lover's face.

In Millay's posthumous sonnet on the sonnet, the form appears not as a small plot of ground or a chosen cloister, but as an erotic prison:

I will put Chaos into fourteen lines  
And keep him there; and let him thence escape  
If he be lucky; let him twist, and ape  
Flood, fire, and demon—his adroit designs

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Will strain to nothing in the strict confines  
 Of this sweet Order, where, in pious rape,  
 I hold his essence and amorphous shape,  
 Till he with Order mingles and combines.  
 Past are the hours, the years, of our duress,  
 His arrogance, our awful servitude:  
 I have him. He is nothing more or less  
 Than something simple not yet understood;  
 I shall not even force him to confess;  
 Or answer. I will only make him good.<sup>13</sup>

When Millay claims that her sonnets “put Chaos into fourteen lines,” she does more than simply repeat the inherited fiction of the sonnet as brief solace or momentary stay against profusion. The stakes seem higher than in Wordsworth’s poem, the tasks put upon poetic form more demanding; this sonnet figures poetic form as a cage for a wild creature. Millay may have in mind Donne’s dictum that “Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce, / For he tames it, that fetters it in verse” (“The Triple Fool”). But the fourteen lines of this sonnet’s cage are not rigid iron bars or fetters but tethers whose strength derives from their flexibility. In refusing to make Chaos “confess,” Millay refuses to use the machinery of rhyme and meter to force her stubborn, resistant subject into saying something against his will, perhaps with a glance at Ben Jonson’s “A Fit of Rhyme against Rhyme,” where rhyme is figured as a torture device to extort false words from the poem: “Rime the rack of finest wits / That expresseth but by fits / True conceit.” She will not use the sonnet form to urge a confession or reply, to reveal the “something simple” that his complicated “designs” conceal. The simple goodness—virtuosity, well-craftedness—of the poem is sufficient, will “answer” or be adequate to the job of capturing Chaos. That alone will yield the solution, that is the way to make the prisoner speak up—to reform him, not punish him or make him squeal. This is a mildly coercive inquisition, a “pious rape.” The curt, determined vows that close the sonnet leave us with a sense that this poetic mastery over an old rival takes its sweetest revenge from its substitution of an inescapable gentleness for the rival’s former cruelty and “arrogance.”

This late poem gathers up a recurring image in Millay’s sonnets of eros as prison. In the fifth poem of the sequence *Fatal Interview*, the speaker counts herself the most abject of prisoners of love since “my chains throughout their iron length / Make such a golden clank upon my ear,” and she would not escape even if she had the strength to do so. By sonnet XVIII in the sequence, the speaker questions her voluntary incarceration more closely: “Shall I be prisoner till my pulses stop / To

hateful Love and drag his noisy chain?" Chaos is like a fugitive, faithless lover captured at last, his amorphousness like that of the unapproachable man of whom the woman says "I chase your colored phantom on the air. . . . Once more I clasp,—and there is nothing there" ("Once more into my arid days like dew" from *Second April*). "I Will Put Chaos into Fourteen Lines" explicitly equates sexual and poetic dominance in its insistence on the control and compression required of the woman poet who seizes upon traditional forms in order to free herself from the forces that would deny her the power to order poetic forms—forces that include traditional male accounts of the need for poetic order.

Like "Nuns Fret Not," Millay's "I Will Put Chaos" ends in such a way as to suggest that the controlling process it describes has been enacted in the sonnet as we read it. Wordsworth's closing hope that in the sonnet the liberty-weary "Should find brief solace there, as I have found" fulfills the promise it expresses, as it refers to the solace afforded by this very sonnet as well as by the poet's habitual writing of them. In the same way, Millay's final promise—"I will only make him good"—points to her goal in all her sonnets as well as to the technical excellence of this one she has just finished. A pun gives this closure a double force. Millay makes the sonnet aesthetically good by tempering the behavior of the unruly subject in its artful cage, making him "good" in the sense of training him to be well-mannered, obedient, and orderly. In Millay's figure, the woman poet binds "Chaos"—a kind of male anti-muse, perhaps the divisive forces of sexuality, or whatever the force may be that tears poems apart rather than inspires them—with the "strict confines" of her ordering art.<sup>14</sup> The entire sonnet is almost an allegory of Judith Farr's somewhat paradoxical formula that the "conventions to which [Millay] submitted . . . served her well."

"I Will Put Chaos into Fourteen Lines" presents the struggle of the syntactic unit to find its completion, and to fit into the metrical and rhyming requirements of the sonnet (here, particularly of the octet), as an erotic tussling. The octet of "I Will Put Chaos" entertains the fiction that the single long sentence that comprises it is allowed free rein to flow from line to line, but is gently curbed (by the poet or by Order itself) at each line ending by the bars of rhyme and meter. The sestet, written in short sentences, largely end-stopped, looks back with precarious assurance on the struggles of the octet. The sonnet's trope for its own procedures is a peculiar one: the poet who dooms her subject into the prison of form acts almost like a pander supervising the mating of Chaos and Order. The twisting of the sentence from line to line illustrates Chaos' snaky attempts to wriggle out of the poem's snare,

but the “adroit designs” the poem attributes to Chaos are, of course, the poet’s designs by whose grace the caged creature may be as lively and various and protean as he wants. Only the sonnet’s strict order of meter, rhyme, and syntax allows us to register the twists taken by the long sentence (lines 3–8) describing Chaos’ ineffectual attempts to escape.<sup>15</sup> Millay here makes enjambment positively sexy.

Perhaps this is merely to say that Millay makes good use of the resources of the sonnet, combining Miltonic or Romantic use of heavy enjambment with a strict Petrarchan division between octet and sestet. But, as we shall see, in the context of Millay’s allusive polemic against the tradition of sexual myths for the sonnet, it is to say rather more. Again the figurative status of poetic closure is at issue. For Wordsworth, when in a sonnet “the sense does not close with the rhyme,” the result desired is a “pervading sense of Unity.” The way in which that unity is achieved is made invisible in favor of the satisfying fullness of the closure. In Milton’s sonnets Wordsworth admires not the unfolding spell of the “sense variously drawn out” in run-on lines, but the achieved plenitude of the completed experience. Once the “brief solace” is found, the poem is over, and the poet can go on to other things, to wander and soar at liberty. For Millay, such run-over lines in the orderly sonnet figure rather the difficult wrestling of the poet to achieve unity, a wrestling that is inseparable from a rallying of opposed sexual forces. Wordsworth’s sonnet ends with a sigh of satisfaction, the remedy having done the trick (“as I have found”), Millay’s with the challenge still ahead, a vow the poet makes to herself (“I will only make him good”). She focuses on the syntactic drama itself, rather than the feeling of satisfaction after the curtain is rung down. The tug of line against syntax figures the poet’s constant struggle with “Chaos,” not the assurance of Miltonic authority, or the comforting sense of respite and accomplishment Wordsworth claims to derive from the sweet order of sonnet constraints. Intricate play with enjambment is a way Millay demonstrates and monitors that she is in charge of the words, not in some “awful servitude” to them.<sup>16</sup> It is a game she knows she is playing, and knows which rules she has invented and which she has inherited. The critical view of Millay that judges her as in need of poetic form to control her emotional impulses merely repeats Millay’s own strategic presentation of herself as such, a self-presentation that itself is in need of interpretation and cannot be taken as a straightforward outline of her poetics.

A sonnet from *Second April*, Millay’s third volume (1921) brings

together the two main figurations for the sonnet which we have been examining. Here a small plot of ground becomes an imprisoning site of too much liberty:

Not with libations, but with shouts and laughter  
 We drenched the altars of love's sacred grove,  
 Shaking to earth green fruits, impatient after  
 The launching of the colored moths of Love.  
 Love's proper myrtle and his mother's zone  
 We bound about our irreligious brows,  
 And fettered him with garlands of our own,  
 And spread a banquet in love's frugal house.  
 Not yet the god has spoken; but I fear  
 Though we should break our bodies in his flame,  
 And pour our blood upon his altar, here  
 Henceforward is a grove without a name,  
 A pasture to the shaggy goats of Pan,  
 Whence flee forever a woman and a man.<sup>17</sup>

Again we see the high price exacted by the bohemian life: the sonnet, and presumably the affair it commemorates, ends with the sickening sense of loss and satiety that follows from banqueting on unripe fruits. No sacrifice to love can make the grove suitable for proper worship again; such overeager illicit lovers can never thereafter become spouses, dutifully bound in marriage. This may be an illicit and transient affair, but as we expect from Shakespearean sonnets, the transient is transformed into something permanent, and the agent of this permanence is the poem itself; Millay's final vision of the goatish couple fleeing "forever" borrows from this expectation while giving it a bohemian twist. But instead of two lovers frozen in the instant before a kiss, as on Keats's urn, this overheated pair is caught in a gesture of self-exile from a hot pastoral they have sullied with their excesses.

As a character in Millay's all-male verse drama *Conversation at Midnight* (1937) argues, with a glance sidelong at Shakespeare's Sonnet 94,

it seems  
 Even to my nostrils that the lilies are beginning to smell;  
 And that the time has come to deck our amorous themes  
 With the honester stenches.

With its bracing candor about modern love, "Not with Libations" lets fresh air into the sonnet, but that air is already tainted with the stench of overindulgence. We might find it a sufficiently revisionary move on Millay's part simply to give the female half of the couple room to admit that she too knows desire and has a sexual will (Millay gives us simply "a

woman and a man," no longer poet and disdainful mistress, burning lover and dark lady), and Millay's sonnets often testify that women, too, know the lust that the Renaissance sonnet traditionally allowed only men to feel. But it would be too simple to say that through its act of bestowing on the woman desires as impatient as the man's the poem bestows on the woman poet the capacity to write sonnets as weighted as a man's. The woman's desire cannot resonate in the room of the sonnet with the same force as his desire; it is a room that has been designed to amplify his tones and to silence hers.<sup>18</sup> To bring these issues to the fore, Millay treats the sonnet as an echo chamber, where we can listen to the voices this improperly proper sonnet has appropriated and revised.

"Not with Libations, but with Shouts and Laughter" is burdened with the weight of too much literature.<sup>19</sup> The poem addresses "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room" in its marking for erotic indulgence the scanty plot of ground Wordsworth identifies with serene retreat. The narrow room of conventional passion is too restrictive for these lovers, who turn their erotic bonds into a prison in which they doom themselves. Despite the Wordsworthian figures and the Shakespearean design, however, this poem's grove is drenched with Keats, from incidental glances at the hymn to Pan in *Endymion*, the "Ode to Psyche," and the sonnet "On Solitude," to more importantly polemical allusions to Keats's sonnet on the sonnet.

Typically, the Keatsian echoes resound in a coarser tone in Millay's "Not with Libations." The lovers crowning themselves with "love's proper myrtle" have plucked some foliage from the "many that are come to pay their vows / With leaves about their brows" (*Endymion*, I.291–92) in the hymn to Pan, but Millay's lovers consign their grove to "the shaggy goats of Pan," not to an uplifted, Keatsian deity who is "the leaven / That spreading in this dull and clotted earth, / Gives it a touch ethereal" (I.296–98).<sup>20</sup> The music that drifts over from the "Ode to Psyche" becomes likewise sensualized. The closing prophecy in "Not with Libations" that "Henceforward is a grove without a name" alludes audibly enough to the vow in the ode to dress Psyche's sanctuary "With buds, and bells, and stars without a name" ("Ode to Psyche," 61). Like the speaker of the ode, Millay's lovers consecrate themselves as their own priests to a form of love which does not have its proper cult in poetry, and like him they adapt the available religious emblems to serve their new god and build him an altar that is erected more in the mind than in any special spot. Keats's ode closes with an invitation to "let the warm Love in," while Millay's sonnet ends with the exile of the warm lovers who, once they have celebrated their inventive rites, must

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abandon the spot. "Not with Libations" closes on a note from Keats's early sonnet beginning "O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell." Locating solitude on a natural prospect or "mongst boughs pavilioned," the sonnet ends with the anticipation, addressing Solitude, that "it sure must be / Almost the highest bliss of human-kind, / When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee" ("O Solitude, if I must with thee dwell," 12–14). Whereas Keats's kindred spirits are left fleeing into the grove of solitude, to engage in "sweet converse of an innocent mind" (10), Millay's lovers "flee forever" from the carnal pasture they have desanctified. Keats's gentle sensualism of anticipation becomes in Millay the disheartening aftermath of consummation.

The most resounding echo in Millay's "Not with Libations" is to Keats's sonnet on the sonnet, "If by Dull Rhymes Our English Must Be Chained." As in "Nuns Fret Not," in Keats's self-reflexive sonnet the poet effects the cure his poem complains of:

If by dull rhymes our English must be chained,  
 And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet  
 Fettered, in spite of pained loveliness,  
 Let us find out, if we must be constrained,  
 Sandals more interwoven and complete  
 To fit the naked foot of Poesy:  
 Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress  
 Of every chord, and see what may be gained  
 By ear industrious and attention meet;  
 Misers of sound and syllable, no less  
 Than Midas of his coinage, let us be  
 Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;  
 So, if we may not let the Muse be free,  
 She will be bound with garlands of her own.

Like the "Ode to Psyche" and "Not with Libations," this sonnet adapts and loosens the instruments of tribute to a deity who is ultimately the muse. In contrast to the trope of the sonnet as a binding place—a scanty plot, writer's colony for one—the sonnet here is explicitly figured as a bound woman, the muse as Andromeda, with the poet as Perseus to the rescue. But rather than free the damsel in distress, this hero simply makes her chains less chafing. It is the fettering, the rules and rhymes and restrictions, that make the sonnet "sweet," for she is sweetest not when she is free but when she is "sweet / Fettered."<sup>21</sup> The intricacies of the sonnet form guarantee that in some measure the poet "must be constrained" in writing it; the poet's task is to make that multiple manacle—of poet to set pattern, of each line handcuffed to its rhyming partner—less constricting, less strictly ornamental and thereby

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more graceful.<sup>22</sup> The “dull rhymes” of the English sonnet as Keats inherited it are “more interwoven” in this poem’s muted, complex rhyme scheme, a double liberation in that it led Keats to develop the pattern of his ode stanzas.<sup>23</sup>

Poetic form itself is the sea-monster that has chained Andromeda to the rock of dull rhyme and stony, unyielding traditions. The poet does not release her, but reweaves her chains, turning them into honoring garlands. The poetic tradition he works in itself has tightened the strands from which Keats is to release her by binding her with new ones, with the assurance that then “She will be bound with garlands of her own.” The trick is to make Andromeda her own sea-monster, to craft a chain for her so cleverly natural that she can believe she has woven it herself as an adornment. In this sonnet Keats has woven a very powerful myth of poetic convention as a prison into which poetry willingly dooms itself, and part of its power derives from the identification of a constricting form with a willingly bound woman.

What are we to make of the echoes from Keats’s sonnet of gentle shackling that resound in Millay’s sonnet of unbridled eros? What in particular are echoes from a man’s sonnet about the sonnet as bound woman doing in a woman’s sonnet about the (perhaps enslaving) price of throwing off the conventional shackles of love between men and women? Keats promises Andromeda that she will be “bound with garlands of her own,” while Millay’s improper modern lovers, celebrating Love in their own reckless way, “fettered him with garlands of our own.”<sup>24</sup> They impose their own shackles on Love, whereas Keats works to impose no shackles on the sonnet from outside poetry herself. Millay’s lovers reject the miserly care marking Keats’s project for the sonnet. In their profligacy they “spread a banquet in [Love’s] frugal house”; they reinterpret the traditional cestus and myrtle of restrained love as celebratory garlands, binding their brows as a mark of erotic victory with the cinctures designed to bind the waist as a mark of purity in love.

In both sonnets, then, the iconography of celebratory, erotic, and poetic garlanding is playfully unraveled and rewoven into a new pattern. Millay’s “grove without a name” should perhaps be named the grove of the Romantic poetics of the sonnet, a lightly constraining enclosure which Millay turns into a bower of irreverent excess. Just as traditionally the woman poet is denied the kind of freedom that may drive the male poet into the retreat of the sonnet’s boundaries, so neither can she be given the responsibility of a poetic Perseus to free the muse from her formal strictures, since she is supposed herself to be the

muse. Even if a poet wishes to bind her with “garlands of her own” they will be the garlands he has experimentally determined are proper to her, garlands of his own after all. Millay does not take up Keats’s call to reshuffle the sonnet’s pattern of rhyming, knowing that no rearrangement can make the form more “natural.” Poetic forms and genres are not natural but ideological. Andromeda’s unfelt, self-willed fetters can figure a perfect marriage (of man and woman, form and subject) or a perfectly crippling ideology. Looking at Keats through the lens of Millay, we can begin to see Andromeda as torn between having to stand for a poetic form herself or for a free spirit that the form holds chained. For a woman writing poetry in the years between the wars, the brittleness of oaths and the shaky fiction of new sexual freedom for women made the sonnet an apt form in which to scrutinize the inherited stances of men toward women and poets toward their muses. By identifying the sonnet’s scanty plot of ground with an erotic grove of excess, turning the chastity belt of poetic form into a token of sexual indulgence, Millay invades the sanctuary of male poetic control with her unsettling formalism in the service of freedom, a freedom that can, as the lovers learn in “Not with Libations,” turn into another kind of entrapment.

In “Not with Libations,” as in “I Will Put Chaos into Fourteen Lines,” Millay addresses the Romantic myths of the sonnet as liberating prison and pleasing fetters, the figurations governing Wordsworth’s “Nuns Fret Not” and Keats’s “If by Dull Rhymes.” Her sonnets reshape those myths with the revisionary force of a woman poet who, however rearguard in the phalanx of modernism, recognizes that she has inherited a genre laden with figurations exclusive to a male poetic authority, and who knows that her adaptations of that genre must engage those very myths and figurations that would bar her from the ranks of legitimate practitioners of the sonnet. While more work on Millay along these lines is not likely to result in the elevation of her to the status of a major twentieth-century poet, it should lead to a more searching understanding of why we judge her to be minor, and to our estimate in general of poets in the modernist period who continued to write in traditional forms. Current feminist work on Millay suggests that in her use of poetic forms “the wish for freedom is always qualified by the sense of restriction”: such an estimate, I believe, even when intended as evidence of Millay’s virtuosity, echoes older dismissals of Millay on the grounds that she moodily concedes to poetic forms or, crippled by emotional turmoil, desperately leans on them, because it

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tends to see the poet as an unwitting victim of these two desires rather than as working consciously in light of the fact that the tradition itself is constantly troping on just this very debate. I have only suggested how a few of Millay's most effective sonnets engage in and reflect upon the struggle between poet and form as to which shall be master. Such engagement is a sign not only that Millay has mastered these inherited forms, but also that she has taken into account the full implications for the woman poet of the figure of poetic "mastery."

<sup>1</sup> For example, there is no work on Millay in the new collection edited by Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom, *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Gould, *The Poet and Her Book: A Biography of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1969), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Stanbrough, "Edna St. Vincent Millay and the Language of Vulnerability," in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), p. 198.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Farr, "Elinor Wylie, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and the Elizabethan Sonnet Tradition," in Maynard Mack and George de Forest Lord, eds., *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), p. 297.

In this context, Farr's mention of Millay's "Petrarchan conventions" should invite some reflection. We cannot speak of a woman's sonnet as we do of a Shakespearean or Petrarchan or Wordsworthian sonnet; and yet the difficulty women writers may have in writing sonnets that respond to their poetic needs is at least nominally suggested in the very fact that we label sonnets after the achievements of the great male practitioners of the form. We commonly speak of one poet writing in the sonnet form named for another: we say that Keats or Frost writes Miltonic sonnets, or that Robinson or Rossetti writes Petrarchan sonnets. Such formulations may raise complicated questions of how American poets adopt English modes, or how modern poets adapt Romantic or Renaissance forms. But we are faced with all those issues and then a vexing number of others when we speak of Christina Rossetti writing Petrarchan sonnets or Edna St. Vincent Millay writing Shakespearean sonnets. The unthinking ease with which we label the generic choices of female poets after the poetic patterns established by male poets may suggest that we are not sufficiently accustomed to thinking of lyric genres in terms of gender. Such labels blind us to the possibility that purely formal criteria for lyric genres such as the sonnet may mask other gender-related criteria. But the genre, too, makes choices. A woman poet, like any poet, will choose to write sonnets for a range of varied reasons, but some of those reasons will necessarily spring from the fact that the tradition of sonnet writing is the work of men.

<sup>5</sup> *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, eds. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1946), III, 1.

<sup>6</sup> If the sonnet form is thus loosely figured in the foxglove bells, the form itself is a readily available, female space, open to the male's visitation whenever he chooses to stop soaring for a while. As we shall see, Keats too compares the

sonnet to a woman, the bound Andromeda. Andromeda, immobile, fettered emblem of the sonnet, is in no position to write one. The woman poet is thus not merely confined to a scanty plot of ground, but she is one herself; poetic form is figured as a receptive female space. If she is herself a sonnet, how can she be expected to write one?

<sup>7</sup> From *The Recluse*, cited in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, ed. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 68. See Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 77–79, for a discussion of the model of the Virgilian career. For Lipking, Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" passes muster as an initiation poem heralding a poet's bursting into full ambition, but Lipking does not consider what it might mean for redefinitions of that genre that a sonnet takes on this power of declaring poetic vocation.

<sup>9</sup> *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Later Years*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1939), II, 653. Wordsworth's estimate of the Miltonic sonnet is perpetuated and canonized in the "Sonnet" article by Lawrence J. Zillman in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: "It remained for Milton . . . to give a greater unity to the form by frequently permitting octave to run into sestet," enl. ed., ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974), p. 783.

<sup>10</sup> John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 199. For extended discussions of the resources of enjambment, see in the same volume, "'Sense Variously Drawn Out': On English Enjambment," pp. 91–116, and the somewhat dissenting view in Justus George Lawler, *Celestial Pantomime: Poetic Structures of Transcendence* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 73–103. In his insistence that "the uses to which [enjambments] are put are as divergent as any verbal acts" in "The Metrical Frame" (p. 146), Hollander is more concerned than is Lawler with how formal and generic frames shape the effects and functions of run-on lines in poetry. Countering what he calls Hollander's "even-handed relativism," Lawler finds "one of the most salient and one of the most recurrent uses" of enjambment to be for "that situation in which, after repeated frustration, the human subject suddenly experiences the overcoming of limitations and an expansion into something beyond those limits," pp. 73–74. Many of Lawler's examples come from poems describing moments of sexual release or consummation (pp. 74–85). Lawler's desire to see "endstopped lines equated with imprisonment and delimitation, and enjambment equated with transcendence and union" (p. 90) almost reverses my sense of Millay's use of the device in the sonnets I discuss; more important, I would stress, following Hollander, that enjambment has significance in any poem as a "function or role of that device in the total poetic style" (*Vision and Resonance*, p. 110), including the matrix of allusions and the expectations established by genre.

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth P. Perlmutter, "A Doll's Heart: The Girl in the Poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Louise Bogan," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 23 (1977),

158. See also Donald Barlow Stauffer, *A Short History of American Poetry* (New York: Dutton, 1974), p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Hyatt Waggoner, *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present* (Boston: Houghton, 1968), p. 464.

<sup>13</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Mine the Harvest* (New York: Harper, 1954), p. 130.

<sup>14</sup> Norman A. Britten, *Edna St. Vincent Millay*, revised ed. (Boston: Twayne, 1982), p. 115, claims that the figure of Chaos in this poem is "based on the folk-motif of the shape-changer."

<sup>15</sup> For example, it is the poet who guarantees that "ape," the verb suggesting the imitative beastliness of Chaos, although it does not bring the sentence to a close, will lock into the sonnet's rhyming grid and find its echoes in "pious rape" and finally in "shape," the force that undoes its action.

<sup>16</sup> Millay's interest in the shifting misalliance between the unit of the poetic line and the completion of grammatical clauses and sentences is evidenced in the way she occasionally repeats a clause that fills or closes a line early in a sonnet with a recurrence of it where it is made to straddle two lines. We find this device in one of her best-known sonnets, where the opening line, "Euclid alone has looked on beauty bare" is relinedated in lines 11–12 as "Euclid alone / Has looked on beauty bare." In an early sonnet she puts in the same line a phrase standing complete in the line and almost the same phrase enjambmed across two lines: "I should not cry aloud—I could not cry / Aloud, or wring my hands. . ." ("If I should learn, in some quite casual way" from *Renascence*.)

<sup>17</sup> *Collected Sonnets of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (New York: Harper, 1941). All citations to Millay's sonnets are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>18</sup> "Not with Libations" seems to have been part of the series of sonnets Millay exchanged with poet Arthur Davison Ficke. Ficke sent his *Sonnet of a Portrait Painter* (1914) to Millay "early in their correspondence," according to Gould, *The Poet and Her Book*, p. 205. The exchange of sonnets between them took place mostly in 1918; his half of the dialogue is collected in the sequence "Beauty in Exile." Certainly part of Millay's goal is to reclaim the sonnet sequence for the voice of the woman. But such a project invites more hazards than I have time to focus on here. See Dorothy Merwin, "The Female Poet and the Embarrassed Reader: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*," *ELH*, 48 (1981), 351–67, esp. p. 352: "Traditionally in English love poetry the man loves and speaks, the woman is devoted and silent. . . . In so far as the [female] speaker presents herself as the beloved, however, she transfers the verbal self-assertion and many of the attributes which in poems traditionally belong to the subject of desire, to desire's normally silent and mysterious object. The result is a devaluation of the erotic object that casts the whole amorous and poetical enterprise in doubt."

<sup>19</sup> Information about Millay's literary influences remains sketchy. For admission to Vassar Millay sent a "list of authors with whom she was 'very well acquainted,'" among them "Shakespeare, Tennyson, Milton, and Wordsworth," according to Britten, *Edna St. Vincent Millay*, p. 4. Gould, *The Poet and Her Book*, pp. 260–62, reports that Millay drafted a "lengthy academic" preface for her 1941 *Collected Sonnets*, "involving the mechanics and history of the sonnet form, in the course of which she pointed to John Milton's glaring faults when he took liberties with the form." When at the urging of Arthur Davison Ficke she wrote

instead a more simple autobiographical introduction, she omitted "parts of the preface in which she said that it was his [Ficke's] sonnets and Meredith's that had been the origin of her own use of the sonnet."

Several of the sonnets into which the characters' conversations array themselves in Millay's *Conversation at Midnight* include explicit allusions to the major sonnet traditions with which Millay's relation is most vexed. In the midst of a discussion about love, two characters share a sonnet to bicker about the attribution of one of the most famous lines in any sonnet:

"It's true, the lilies are beginning to fester a bit,"

Ricardo said; "who wrote that awful line?"

"Why . . . it was Andrew Marvell, wasn't it?"

Said Merton doubtfully. "Your guess is as good as mine,"

Threw in Pygmalion . . . (p. 53)

During a political discussion, a monologue in sonnet form by the party's conservative host begins on a Wordsworthian note:

"Not that the world is so much with us," Merton

Remarked, "but such a world! It seems to me

It's getting noisier every day; I'm certain

'Tis more uncivil . . ." (p. 64)

<sup>20</sup> All quotations from Keats are from *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 2nd ed., John Barnard, ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

<sup>21</sup> The "sweet" works both ways, and this Miltonic enjambment at the end of the second line, balancing "sweet" between the two words that surround it, links Keats with Milton, among other predecessors from whose grip he claims to release the sonnet, but that link reinforces our sense that Keats is not really at liberty to release her at all. She is too tightly bound in the garlands of tradition.

<sup>22</sup> See Hollander, *Vision and Resonance*, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> See Barnard, *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, p. 645. In this innovative rhyme scheme, no rhyming pair of lines has less than two intervening lines until we reach the final quatrain, a pattern of delay in rhyming which approximates to the ear the muted music of a blank-verse paragraph. This effect is reinforced by the sonnet's single rounded period, gracing the tight form with the unity and freedom Wordsworth sought in the Miltonic model.

<sup>24</sup> That the resounding, solid last line of Keats's sonnet finds its corresponding echo not at the end of Millay's sonnet but at its midpoint may suggest that Millay is exploring what happens when you take up where Keats left off. For another Millay sonnet that takes up where a Keats poem leaves off, see "Sonnet in Dialectic" from *Mine the Harvest*, which begins "And is indeed truth beauty?" It often seems that when Millay alludes in her sonnets to sonnets by others, she recalls not simply the phrases or lines, but where those echoed lines fit in the architecture of the source sonnet and in her own, and designedly locates them in a different part of the structure. Thus the perhaps too openly derivative image of

Thus in the winter stands the lonely tree,

Nor knows what birds have vanished one by one,

Yet knows its boughs more silent than before,

in "What Lips My Lips Have Kissed" from *The Harp-Weaver* recalls "those boughs which shake against the cold, / Bare, ruined choirs, where late the sweet

birds sang" of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73. But the metaphor that opens Shakespeare's sonnet is switched to open the sestet in Millay's sonnet. Sonnet 36 from Millay's sequence "Epitaph for the Race of Man" from *Wine from These Grapes* begins, "His heatless room the watcher of the stars / Nightly inhabits when the night is clear," an allusion to the "watcher of the skies" that initiates the sestet of Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." Likewise the first line of "Nuns Fret Not" is echoed in the opening line of the sestet of "When I too long have looked upon your face."

# Craft, Character, Comedy: Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind*

BERNARD F. DUKORE

Although critics often undervalue writers of farcical comedy, the more discerning among them distinguish the artist from the hack whose formulas or gimmicks substitute for insight into psychology and society. Not only is such insight compatible with farcical comedy, but formulas and gimmicks are not confined to this type of play. Thus, King Louis XIV asked Boileau, one of the most prominent critics of the age, who in his professional judgment had been the best writer during his own reign; the discerning critic, unhesitatingly and very much to the king's surprise, named Molière.<sup>1</sup>

To succeed in ridiculing human follies, Molière believed, the comic writer must be faithful to life and portray human beings as they really are. His play *Improvisation at Versailles* makes comic capital of the notion that he did this so successfully, some people were upset because they imagined he modeled his characters on them. Nevertheless, critics frequently tend to regard the light treatment of serious subjects as a mark of triviality. Bernard Shaw has suffered charges that he is merely a mocker, therefore not to be taken seriously, or, in a more sophisticated variant, that his comedy defeats his moral, social, and political purposes since it distorts whatever realistic observations underlie them.

Furthermore, cleverly crafted comedies are now considered so old-fashioned that terms like well-made play are pejorative, not descriptive. No matter that Ben Jonson's major comedies have artfully intricate construction or that the plot of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* is that of a well-made play. Both writers are dead—or

classics, which can be similar—and despite their admirers neither is fashionable.

His works translated into two dozen languages, Alan Ayckbourn, without forays into movies and television, is England's most successful playwright for the theater. Until recently, however, serious critical attention has eluded him. Even so, only one major academic journal has carried scholarly articles about his work, *Modern Drama*, whose March 1983 issue has two. Their titles, though accurate, may suggest what is necessary to persuade academic readers to pay attention to him: "Alan Ayckbourn: Few Jokes, Much Comedy" and "The Serious Side of Alan Ayckbourn."<sup>2</sup> Only one book-length critical study is devoted solely to his plays, *Alan Ayckbourn*, by Michael Billington, theater critic of the *Guardian*. His appraisal pinpoints the disjunction between, to borrow terms from Wilde's subtitle of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Ayckbourn's apparently trivial comedies and the concerns of earnest critics: "Alan Ayckbourn is popular. He is prolific. And he writes comedies. For all those reasons he is still, I believe, seriously underrated. He is constantly written about as if he were a boulevard lightweight whereas he shows an increasing capacity to handle the darker side of human nature while retaining his technical adventurousness."<sup>3</sup> Published the same year as Billington's book is *Peter Hall's Diaries*, which, as if underscoring his judgment, contains an entry for 28 August 1973, after Sir Peter had seen a performance of Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular*: "It is a hard, beautifully constructed play. But because it is commercial, it tends to be unregarded. I think Ayckbourn is much more likely to be in the repertoire of the National Theatre in fifty years' time than most of the current Royal Court dramatists."<sup>4</sup>

Filled with photographs and as readable as a Sunday supplement, Ian Watson's *Conversations with Ayckbourn* (1981) technically qualifies as a coffee-table book, but the titular conversations are enormously valuable in documenting Ayckbourn's approach to his art. A practical man of the theater, he devotes much time to running the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round in Scarborough. As Director of Productions, he schedules his new plays for performance. Since his audience, residents of the seaside resort town and visitors on holiday, is not captive (as a former resident of a resort city, Honolulu, I can testify that the easiest thing for such an audience to do is not attend the theater), he must, together with whatever else he may wish to achieve, appeal to that audience in terms it can accept.

I'm on a crusade to try and persuade people that theatre can be fun; but every time I start doing that, some hairy bugger from

the left comes in and tells them it's instructive, and drives them all out again. If I want to be instructed, I go to night school. I may be instructed in the theatre, but I don't go in there predominantly for instruction. I go in there for entertainment, and of course all the best plays instruct me, or enlighten me—it's a better word than instruct. But if you put a label on a whisky bottle "For medicinal use only" on it, it rather puts you off the drink.<sup>5</sup>

While Ayckbourn considers enlightenment, which includes what Billington calls the darker side, to be a by-product of entertainment, he does not ignore it: "In trying to write a rounded character, one obviously writes quite often the very unpleasant side of them. All my characters have flaws and are pock-marked, and I don't do a cosmetic job on them."<sup>6</sup> A passage in Shaw's 1898 Preface to *Plays Pleasant* applies to Ayckbourn's comedies: "I have always cast my plays in the ordinary practical comedy form in use at all theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun [...] I was more than willing to shew that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in the wrong hands, can dehumanize the drama."<sup>7</sup>

On May 30, 1985, Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind*, which he directed, opened in Scarborough. I saw it there on June 8th. If it follows the usual Ayckbourn path, it will open in London a year or two later and, still later, be published in a Samuel French Acting Edition. This essay, completed in 1986, will analyze the play first from the aspect of craft or dramatic technique, which necessarily involves interpreting its plot; then its depiction of character; and finally, tying them together, as comedy. Quotations and descriptions are from the typescript used at Scarborough, augmented by the production I saw.<sup>8</sup>

The title is of course a pun. Particularly mindful of woman in today's world, *Woman in Mind* also deals with the mind of a particular woman. This comedy, about a woman who is suffering a mental breakdown, dramatizes the process, with remarkable technical dexterity, from her point of view. To focus on its structure, thereby clarifying what on stage and page is actually complex and subtle, I will divide its action into comprehensible phases.

*Phase 1: We share Susan's view of reality.* At the start, a woman is lying on the ground of her garden. Kneeling beside her is a man whose speech is not understandable. "Ah! Score ache." "Wo! Won't spider slit up pikelet." "Squeezy, cow, squeezy." "Climb octer bin sir. Mrs sure

pardon choose 'un.' " However, we understand her. "What?" "Squeez?" "I've no idea what you're saying." "Who are you, anyway?" Moments later, we hear him call her Susan and himself Bill Windsor, a doctor. It turns out that Susan, who is in her forties, stepped on the end of a garden rake, which hit her on the head and knocked her unconscious. Only then do we understand that we have heard his words from her viewpoint, as gibberish, whereas her words were gibberish to him. What he said (as neither text nor performance explains) was "Ah! You're awake." "No! Don't try to sit up like that." "Easy, now, easy." "I'm Doctor Windsor. This is your garden, Susan." From Susan's viewpoint, we heard "Pea squeak jinglish," not "Please speak English."

*Phase 2: Still sharing her view, we see her family.* Understanding him is one step toward a cure, which involves adjustment to reality. When he leaves to check on an ambulance he ordered, she hears Andy's voice. As he speaks, the light brightens. Tall, athletic, charming, and like Bill a bit younger than her, her husband Andy fusses over her, professes his love, and is solicitous of her health, as are Lucy, her lovely daughter in her twenties, and Tony, her handsome younger brother, who also appear. "You really do spoil me, all of you," she tells them while they do so. Andy pets her, calls her intelligent and pretty, and adds that all of them would be lost without her, particularly he, who holds her more dearly and preciously than he can express.

*Phase 3: The view we have shared becomes problematic.* Just after Andy leaves to cancel the ambulance, Bill returns. When Susan tells him that her husband feels she should stay at home in bed, he is surprised, since he was unaware her husband had returned home. Her sister-in-law Muriel, he concludes, must have erred. But Susan denies having a sister-in-law, knowing a Muriel, or having been given a cup of tea by her—though Bill says he just passed her, returning from the garden with an empty tea cup. Susan insists the only woman she has seen all day has been her daughter, who was playing tennis with her brother. Bill recognizes something is amiss. Does she remember her son? She has none, she says. But Bill can see neither the tennis court, the swimming pool, nor the rose beds she declares are on the property. When he reports only a small, tidy garden, beyond which is a pond with a stone frog, we question the dramatized reality of the family we have seen. Her brother brought her champagne, she asserts, and we saw him do so; Bill points out that he left none behind. Although she dismisses him as doctor, he refuses to leave. When she consents to go to the hospital if her husband approves, he agrees and will wait for her husband's arrival. Upon the entry of a man and woman, it becomes evident that the family

we saw existed only in Susan's mind and that the new, unattractive arrivals are her real family: a solemn husband, the Reverend Gerald Gannet, in his mid-forties, and a prim sister-in-law, Muriel. Susan faints.

*Phase 4: No longer sharing her view, we observe her as part of objective reality.* As at the start of the first scene, Susan awakens in the garden. We learn that her son Rick has arrived for lunch, that she not Gerald has difficulty sleeping at night, that both are unhappily married, that she still hallucinates, and that Muriel, a terrible cook, also hallucinates (about her late husband). For two years, Rick has been living with a religious sect which practices vegetarianism and maintains a vow of silence. According to Susan, he is afraid of women and he communicates by post with his father, not with her.

*Phase 5: She retreats from reality into fantasy.* Once the estrangement of mother and son is established, she hallucinates again. With Gerald present, her imaginary daughter appears, then her imaginary brother. When Bill arrives, he is encouraged to learn that Susan remembers she has a son. While he and Gerald, ignoring her, discuss the book Gerald is writing, a history of the parish since 1386, for the following year's anniversary (since this was one year after the performance I saw, the date would probably change each year), Susan's mind leaves reality. Lucy brings champagne from Andy, who is preparing a gourmet lunch after which Lucy and Tony will tidy up so that Susan may convalesce for as long as she pleases—a contrast to Gerald having awakened her. In this hallucination, she is the family writer—"probably our most important living historical novelist," according to the *Observer*. Still ignoring her, Gerald and Bill enter the house. Unlike Susan's real son, her imaginary daughter confides in her, not the father. Although Lucy wants her father and uncle to like her fiancé, this matter seems to rest with the all-important Susan, who promises to make sure they do. After Lucy leaves, Bill announces he will stay for lunch, which to Susan's chagrin Muriel will cook.

*Phase 6: Susan's fantasies invade reality.* Imaginary world mixes with real world as Lucy returns with champagne and Susan addresses her, not Bill, about a chair each is adjusting. Although Susan recognizes what has happened, she denies she has had more hallucinations. After she tells Bill what she does with her days and Gerald with his nights (writing), Gerald enters with a tray, glasses, and a dusty bottle of Marsala sherry, a far cry from the vintage Dom Perignon supplied by her imaginary family. Preparing Bill for what to expect at lunch, Susan despite Gerald's protests reveals their son does not speak to them. While

the men drink Marsala, the distraught Susan, retreating into the world of her mind, drinks the glass of champagne left by Lucy. Muriel arrives to fetch them into the house for lunch. As Susan prepares to follow, Lucy invites her to lunch with the other family. Although she wavers, she chooses reality. Ayckbourn visualizes the moment: “*LUCY stands shattered. SUSAN turns to go, aware of the effect she has had upon her daughter. She nearly collides with GERALD returning.*” The shattered daughter mirrors the emotionally shattered mother, who is about to but does not yet collide with reality. Enter Muriel, who entreats Susan to come to table before the food burns. Gerald joins Muriel. Tony appears with a small garden table set for four. Torn between both worlds, Susan pleads with the imaginary family to let her enter the house. But they make her admit that those inside the house will hurt her as always, whereas they love her and do not want her hurt—that is, she tells this to herself through personifications.

*Phase 7: Her fantasy people influence her behavior toward real people, but she cannot cope with unexpected reality.* When reality returns, as the doctor calls her to lunch, her delusions dominate her. “Tell him to take a jump,” urges Tony; “Mind his own business,” prompts Lucy. “Drop dead,” adds Tony, and Lucy repeats his advice. “Oh, Bill,” says Susan, “do drop dead.” As Bill leaves, the family in Susan’s mind, including Andy, cheerfully assures her she did well—that is, she tries to persuade herself she acted wisely. In the midst of their banter, enter Susan’s real son, Rick, who contrary to expectations seems to be an ordinary young man. When he asks her to join everyone for lunch, she is dismayed and uncertain. Unable to distinguish between reality and hallucination, she sways unsteadily and asks, “I wonder if one of you would be so good as to hold on to me for a moment?” The only one who can possibly help her, Rick moves—in time to catch her as she faints.

*Phase 8: When reality becomes unsettling, her fantasies dominate it.* Like Act I, Act II opens with Susan emerging from a faint. Rick announces he has left the group and, newly married, lives in London. With this news, which Gerald has not yet heard, Susan conjures up her daughter (who unlike her son confided in her before marriage). Rick confesses that he will go with his wife Tess, a trained nurse, to Thailand, where she was offered a job. When Susan wishes she had a daughter, Lucy looks up. When Gerald intrudes, so does Tony, armed with a shotgun, ready to use on him (which Susan wishes a brother would do). After Rick departs, she tells Gerald of the marriage. However, her imaginary family, as before, voices her thoughts before she does until, not as

before, she becomes so absorbed in the world of her mind that while she does not always have them cue her, she has them approve her words:

SUSAN: You smug—  
 LUCY: Self satisfied—  
 SUSAN: Self satisfied—  
 TONY: Conceited—  
 SUSAN: Conceited . . . bastard!

When Muriel enters to support Gerald, Susan drives both away.

*Phase 9: She attempts to keep a grip on reality.* Heartbroken over what she did, she tries to banish her imaginary family, as she did her real one. To compensate, Lucy states that the *Sunday Times* called her the most brilliant female heart surgeon in the country. Susan tells her to shut up, since she is not a heart surgeon, and to go away. When Lucy tearfully does so, a remorseful Susan apologizes and asks her to return. But it is Gerald who returns, accepting her apology. Susan responds to his platitudes with sarcasm, provoking him to leave to work on his book. Although she pleads that his departure would destroy their relationship completely, he goes.

*Phase 10: She loses control of her fantasies.* As the light turns to a romantic sunset, her imaginary husband, offering warmth and comfort, replaces her real one. However, she recognizes that this family is different. Previously they came when she called them. Now they arrive, even enter her conversations with real people, as they please—that is, when she unconsciously calls them, a fact of which she remains unconscious. Though she tells Andy to leave, he stays. But when he suggests to her—that is, when she perceives through him—that he stays because she does not want him to go, she begins to defend her real husband and his book. Symptomatic of her increasing mental instability, her defense breaks down into garbled threats: “I might just pop upstairs and embarrass my son and discuss sexually transmitted diseases with him. Or help Muriel make a soap flake soup.” Desperate, she recognizes that her imaginary family speaks her thoughts before she does. Her confusion accelerates. She adopts Andy’s tone of voice, he hers; she adopts Tony’s, then Lucy’s; he adopts Tony’s; in a single speech she adopts her own, Lucy’s, and her own again; and so forth until she is utterly bewildered.

*Phase 11: She may, we perceive, be adjusting to reality.* As normal afternoon light replaces the romantic sunset, she is pleased with herself for having banished the people of her mind. While she commands them never to return, Bill unexpectedly returns. At first startled, she becomes happy, as she says, at the intrusion of calmness and sanity into her life.

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She confesses that her hallucinations have persisted. When Bill promises to arrange an appointment with a psychiatrist and to help her fight the problem, she is grateful. To her pleasant surprise, he confesses that he finds her attractive and has long admired her from afar.

*Phase 12: Fantasy and reality appear to collide.* As he is about to kiss her, Lucy appears. Is the family in her mind returning to separate her from reality? She tells Bill about Lucy. Although he cannot see her, he moves to where Susan says she is and pretends to talk to her. With her eyes fixed on Bill, Lucy joins her mother and, as he addresses what is now an empty space, questions her about this apparently insane stranger who chatters away to thin air. Tony enters, rifle at the ready, asking whether Susan needs protection. Andy enters, prepared to assist. Although he wishes to interrogate the intruder, Susan is confident Bill will not hear him.

*Phase 13: What we perceived as reality, since we again adopted her view, we now see is a more complex fantasy, over which she has no control.* The sky darkens. Andy asks Bill what he is doing. To Susan's alarm, Bill responds. In other words, his reassuring presence and declaration of love were a new form of Susan's delusions. Actually, we were warned of this possibility. Before leaving at the end of Phase 10, Andy exclaimed, "Nothing is who it is! No one is what he seems!"—a signal from a personified part of Susan's mind, forecasting a new phase of mental deterioration. Now, her imaginary husband threatens the supposedly real doctor, who is actually a Bill of her mind. As Tony prepares to chuck him into the lake, Andy begins to make love to her.

*Phase 14: She rejects reality.* Abruptly ending the scene is a blackout, followed immediately by a loud thunderclap, rain, and a flash of lightning. Alone, Susan sprawls on the grass, smiling, as rain pours on her. It is the middle of the night. An angry Gerald tries to make her return inside. Unaware of her actions, she has set fire to his study, destroying all but one page of his book, and has written a message to Muriel from her dead husband. "Why did you do it, Susan? Do you hate me that much?" asks Gerald. Although she denies having done anything, she admits hating him. Her brother Tony did it, she claims, and calls Bill to witness her whereabouts. But she has no brother, says Gerald, and Bill helped to put her to bed much earlier (thereby, perhaps, prompting her delusions about him).

*Phase 15: Victim of her delusions, she finds everyone in the real world turning imaginary and mixing with her fantasy figures.* When Gerald leaves to phone for an ambulance, she screams at him until her imaginary family returns, bringing sunshine. Susan's delusions transform more

figures from the real world into fantasy figures. Tess (offstage) becomes a dim-witted new maid, Bill a cheap bookie, Muriel a pregnant maid who brings everyone glasses of champagne with small frogs in each glass (echoing the stone frog in her pond), Gerald a jockey with a turned-around collar, and Rick a rickshaw driver (distorting his name and trip to Asia). In contrast to earlier hallucinations, everyone ignores Susan. When she shouts at them for attention, they rush forward to greet her—to her alarm. Suddenly, Muriel returns with more champagne, no longer pregnant but the mother of a child named Harry (her late husband's name).

*Phase 16: Divorced from Susan's view, we perceive her total madness.* Everyone warmly toasts Susan, who offers a speech to her friends and family, including “two wonderful children, Lucy and Rick.” But her speech, begun in English, turns into the sort of gibberish spoken by Bill at the start of the play. Trying to say how deeply proud she is, she says “heaply cowed siam” (the last word also alluding to the country her son is going to). She becomes incomprehensible. One may recall that “December bee” is “Remember me” and interpret “Hang few” as “Thank you,” but what remains, such as “Tinny beers a show,” makes clear only that her mental breakdown is complete. Whereas we previously understood her, sharing her view, she no longer makes sense to us. With dazzling theatrical inventiveness, Ayckbourn has dramatized her mental deterioration.

“I think a big piece of us dies in a marriage,” Watson records Ayckbourn as stating. Either we fail to adjust at all, or else “one personality, being stronger, will eclipse the other. Sometimes this happens by slow erosion—in the woman’s case it’s usually a long-term marathon: she’ll just whittle away.” In the man’s it is a matter of shrinking: he diminishes. “One sees in Scarborough the man in the garden, smoking by the shed—I’ve seen that quite a lot—because his wife won’t have tobacco smoke in the house. [ . . . ] And that’s a case of one personality having just gently established a superiority.”<sup>9</sup> Although *Woman in Mind* emphasizes the woman, the play does not oversimplify life but portrays both cases.

The loving attention paid to Susan by her imaginary husband compensates for her real husband’s inattentiveness. A doting brother replaces a grumbling sister-in-law. A daughter eager to confide replaces an uncommunicative son. Whereas Gerald would send her off in an ambulance, Andy wants to care for Susan himself. Her mind creates the affectionate family missing from her life. Early on, the doctor cautiously

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refuses to say that anything is wrong with her mind, but when she replies to his question, "You—don't recall whether you've got a son by any chance, do you?" with "A son? Certainly not," we suspect, since we take Bill to be the voice of reality, that something is amiss. "Please don't go on," she begs when he begins to describe her garden. Her appraisal of it as "some place I wouldn't choose to live in, even in my wildest nightmares" reveals that her life is a nightmare.

Susan's first scene with Gerald confirms our suspicions. Although it might seem reasonable to waken her since it is 11:30 a.m. and her son has arrived for lunch, Gerald's thinly veiled sarcasm suggests otherwise. "There is a school of thought that believes that sleep is for the night," he says. "You seem to be out to disprove them." To her plea that she finds it difficult to sleep at night, he retorts. "Hardly surprising. If you sleep all day." When she reminds him that the hospital discharged her only that morning, he replies, "Presumably they released you because they considered you fit and well." But Ayckbourn does not render this relationship simplistically. Soon she explains why she cannot sleep at night: "Perhaps it's because I'm not very happy, Gerald." "Well, who is?" he asks, and answers, "Very few." When she states that he seems among those few, his response indicates his torment: "Do I? Maybe I'm just better at hiding these things." As this exchange suggests, both members of an unhappy marriage suffer. Pompously, he tells her that if she worked harder during the day she might sleep at night. Angrily, she insists that she does work hard and begins a litany of such housekeeping drudgeries as cooking, washing up, laundry, and "the sheer boring slog of tidying up." But he has obviously heard "the catalogue" many times before. Just as his inability to understand her complaints annoys her, her reiteration of them annoys him. When both agree that something must be wrong, she articulates basic sources of her discontent:

I don't know what my role is these days. I don't any longer know what I'm supposed to be doing. I used to be a wife. I used to be a mother. And I loved it. People said, Oh, don't you long to get out and do a proper job? And I'd say, No thanks, this is a proper job, thank you. Mind your own business. But now it isn't any more. The thrill has gone.

To this, Gerald tries to hide his sense of personal failure with the question, "Oh, we're back on that, are we?" and to change the subject by quoting John Keble's "The Christian Year": "The trivial round, the common task, / Should furnish all we ought to ask." Revealingly, Ayckbourn has him misquote the passage. "Will" replaces "Should," as

Gerald tries to dominate her by certainties, and "need" replaces "ought," as he reasons not her need.

But the subject inevitably returns. "*Offhandedly*," Susan tells him he must know she no longer loves him, nor for that matter does he love her. When he begins to protest, she interrupts him:

SUSAN: We don't kiss—we hardly touch each other—we don't make love—we don't even share the same bed now. We sleep at different ends of the room—

GERALD: That's just sex you're talking about. That's just the sexual side—

SUSAN: Well, of course it is—

GERALD: There's more to it than that, surely?

SUSAN: Not at the moment there isn't.

Later, she blames his writing for their lack of sex: "That's tended to burn up most of his midnight oils." Small wonder, then, that she avenges herself by destroying his manuscript. Although she admits that sex has not been the only important aspect of their relationship, she perceives, "once that's gone—all *that*—it becomes important. Over-important, really." When they shared sex, "everything else, the everyday bits, just ticked along nicely. But take that away, the really joyous part of us—and everything else rather loses its purpose." Sadly, Gerald does not understand. To him, her statements are only accusations that he has let her down, failed to deliver, and is at fault. But guilt underlies his anger. Whereas she made no charges, he clearly has accused himself. In doing so, he has unwittingly pronounced a verdict of guilty.

Partly because Susan is frustrated, she snipes at her sister-in-law, whose cooking, Gerald admits, is abominable. Sarcastically, the insecure Susan makes Muriel feel insecure. Although Muriel argues that she cooked for her mother during the old woman's last twelve years and for her husband during his last seven, all Susan says is, "I've no doubt you'll see us off as well, Muriel." Accurately, Gerald reprimands her, "That's a very unfeeling remark." Susan comically scores off Muriel, whom one tends to regard as she does, and Gerald is pompous, but Susan is not blameless.

While, given the perspective of the play, Susan is more sinned against than sinning, she inadvertently reveals her deficiencies in raising her son. "Sixteen years old and, until I told him, he thought his bed got damp in the night because the roof leaked. You did nothing for him, Gerald. Nothing. He could have died for all you cared. And now he's grown up he won't even speak to me." Apart from her

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preoccupation with herself, to which, as usual, she turns the subject, the baldness of her remarks suggests that she herself alienated Rick. His complaints to her in the second act show more of her failings as a mother. "I remember how you used to be with girls I used to bring home," he says. Although she recalls that they got on well together, he disabuses her of this fancy: "No, you didn't, Mum. I mean, frankly, you used to embarrass the hell out of them. [ . . . ] You used to get them into corners and start going on about—I don't know—contraception methods and multiple orgasms . . . I mean, I'd hardly even kissed them, you were asking them for their medical histories." She protests that these teenage girls needed sexual education and "I wasn't having a woman going out with a son of mine who didn't know what she was about. You'd have thanked me for it later . . . You? You didn't know a thing till I told you." "I did," says he, "We all did. It's just that we didn't necessarily want to sit down and talk to you about it." Her response to him parallels Gerald's to her. She regards Rick's statements as an accusation that she was a total failure as a mother. In vain, he denies having said that. She lashes out destructively: "I should have had a daughter. I could have coped with her. (*Rather waspishly*) Boys are all such delicate blossoms, aren't they." Naturally, he responds in kind: "God help any daughter who had you as a mother." He tries to appease her by pointing out his father's defects concerning his girlfriends: "Terrified they'd turn out to be the daughters of Beelzebub. Scarlet women after his son's body." However, none of this penetrates her mind. "It's no use," she replies. "You can be as loyal to your father as you like. I know which one of us was responsible for all this." Despite the sympathies Ayckbourn has generated for Susan, he is psychologically acute enough to show her flaws and to demonstrate that, with son as with sister-in-law, she attacks when hurt. But he also emphasizes her genuine pain.

Another aspect of Susan's character is low self-esteem. Told how she knocked herself out, she comments, "Typical of me." Not only does she watch too much television, "I watch such trash most of the time, I just sit there feeling guilty. Saying to myself, what on earth am I doing watching *this*? Why aren't I watching something useful? I mean," she explains, oxymoronically, "I do try sometimes to watch interesting programmes but I find them all so boring." A sense of worthlessness creates guilt, but unchanged behavior generates more guilt.

Although *Woman in Mind* does not portray the frightened, unassertive man smoking a cigarette by the garden shed, it shows that marriage has broken both husband and wife. Gerald's retreat from

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Susan into research parallels a retreat to the shed, and we see him flee to his study to avoid hearing her recriminations. Furthermore, when their son arrived, Gerald confesses, "I hid in the hall cupboard. Suddenly I lost my nerve and hid in the cupboard." Gerald's pompous self-assurance is a mask that fails to hide the suffering face beneath it.

As some quotations and paraphrases in this analysis of Ayckbourn's craft and characterization have suggested, *Woman in Mind* is essentially comic. Its humor is an integral part of these aspects. At the outset, when Susan and we cannot make sense of what Bill says, the play's mood, despite her fears, is not stark terror. Rather, we laugh at her reactions. "Oh God, I've died. That's what it is. I've died." Then, reducing death to tourism: "And—wherever it is I've gone—nobody speaks English." When Bill's "Choose 'un" turns to "Susan," she responds with comic incongruity: "Susan? Yes, that's me. (*pointing at herself, loudly, as to a foreigner*) Me Susan, yes." Laughter derives from the doctor's professional uncertainties, partly revealed in his mechanical catchphrases, partly in his repeated qualifications when he tries to reassure his patient. An ambulance will take her to the hospital, he says. "Better safe than sorry. Probably just an overnight stop, that's all. Be back home here tomorrow. Right as rain. Probably." Comic too is the contrast between his concern for his patient, who may have suffered a concussion, and his seemingly greater concern for his bag, which he cannot open because of a jammed lock, the incongruity underscored by her ironic awareness of it:

BILL: [ . . . ] I mean I *can* get it open. In a real emergency. But it does entail a good deal of force in order to do so. And stuff tends to scatter. All over the place. So.

SUSAN: Oh, well. Please don't bother on my account.

BILL: Thanks.

Much of the humor comes from character, notably as it functions in mutually destructive situations between husband and wife. When Gerald misquotes Keble about trivial daily tasks sufficing to fulfill one's expectations, Susan retorts with customary sarcasm: "Yes, it's usually about now that you come up with that invaluable piece of advice, Gerald," which she says is untrue. "Whoever wrote it was talking through his hat. Anyway, how can you possibly believe anybody who rhymes 'road' with 'God.' " His own retorts avenge such insults. To her question, "We've known each other rather a long time, haven't we?" he does not answer but instead denigrates her: "Said by anybody else, that

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could have been interpreted as an affectionate remark. Spoken by you, it sounds like an appalling accusation."

Passages concerning Muriel's ineptitude in the kitchen strikingly exemplify the creation of comedy from the interplay of characters. As Gerald tries to avoid wounding her, Muriel becomes defensive and Susan turns sarcastic:

- GERALD: This is an interesting cup of coffee, Muriel.  
 MURIEL: Nice?  
 GERALD: Very interesting. Yes.  
 SUSAN: (*examining her cup for the first time*) What powder did you use?  
 MURIEL: Here we go, the Spanish Inquisition—  
 SUSAN: I was only curious—  
 MURIEL: I used the coffee in the tin marked Coffee. All right?  
 GERALD: That sounds logical to me.  
 SUSAN: Yes, it is. Fairly. This is the ready ground coffee, Muriel, not the instant . . .  
 MURIEL: I don't know what sort it is. If you don't want it, I'll take it back . . .  
 GERALD: No, no, this is perfect, Muriel. First rate.  
 MURIEL: (*muttering*) Can't do anything right, can I?  
 SUSAN: Delicious, Muriel. You must give us the secret.

When Muriel prepares to make lunch, she asks Susan whether the herbs in a can near the teapot are thyme or sage. Answer: "That's Earl Grey Tea." Muriel's response hints that Susan's clarification has come too late: "(worried) Earl Grey Tea. Right. (*moving off*) I do wish you'd label things, Susan." After lunch, in conversation with Susan, Gerald confirms the hint: "You know that really was quite the most appalling meal I've ever tasted. I'd forgotten how bad she was. Burnt Earl Grey omelettes." Even following Susan's destruction of Gerald's book, Ayckbourn draws laughter from Muriel's culinary disabilities. Upon Rick's report that he asked her to make cups of cocoa for everyone, the clergyman comments in character, "All that and now compulsory cocoa. Locusts follow shortly."

A fertile source of comedy is skepticism as to Muriel's religious experiences, which include sensing her dead husband gazing at her and feeling his breath on her cheek—suggestive parallels to Susan's hallucinations. "God, in His Infinite Wisdom and with the entire cosmos to choose from," says Susan, "is unlikely to base the Kingdom of Heaven around Muriel's bedroom." When Gerald calls the remark blasphemous, she apologizes. When he tells her that it is not he to whom she should apologize, she says, "Sorry, God." When he explains that he

meant Muriel, she retorts, "Oh, rather. Let's get our priorities right. Muriel, then God, then Gerald. I've got it. Sorry, Muriel." Upon what Muriel considers decisive evidence that her expectations are valid—her friend Enid, trying to will her late husband Desmond back, awoke one morning to discover, on the bedroom ceiling, words written in chalk: "LOVE . . . ENID . . . ETERNALLY"—both Gerald and Susan comment:

GERALD: I recall, though, that they did establish it was Enid's handwriting, didn't they?

MURIEL: Oh, yes. But then he worked through her hand, didn't he? Desmond made use of her hand . . .

SUSAN: (*murmuring*) I hope he put it back when he'd finished with it . . .

Climaxing the sexually repressed Susan's dislike of her sexually repressed sister-in-law, Susan, before or after setting fire to Gerald's study, climbs on the chest of drawers in Muriel's room to write a message on the ceiling, supposedly from Muriel's late husband: "KNICKERS OFF, MURIEL."

Another fruitful source of comedy, as implied previously, is the series of misunderstandings revolving around the people in Susan's mind. Early in the play, she tells Lucy, concerning a bench, "Just put it there, darling, thank you." "Right," says Lucy. "Right you are," says Bill, who puts down a chair. Confused, Susan asks him whether she just said anything.

BILL: Er—yes. You said—just put it there. Darling.

SUSAN: I did?

BILL: Did you—not know you'd said it?

SUSAN: Yes, I knew I'd said it. I was just checking if you'd heard it. You had.

BILL: Yes. I had. (*he smiles at her*)

*Pause.*

No more hallucinations, I hope?

This exchange demonstrates Ayckbourn's complex weaving of comedy with craft and characterization. Funny—partly because of Susan's confusion, partly because of verbal repetitions, partly because of irony—the passage also foreshadows Susan's imagining Bill to declare his love for her and reveals, through her use of a term of endearment, her romantic interest in him.

When the family in her mind prompts her to tell Bill to drop dead, the sequence is extremely funny, as are those in which two sets of conversation—one by the imaginary family, the other by the real one—occur simultaneously, and the scene in which Susan and Andy speak in

the manner of Lucy and Tony, and of each other. Predictably, Bill attempts to talk to Lucy, whom he cannot see; the result is predictably comic. Unpredictably, he turns out to be a Bill of Susan's mind and talks to her imaginary family; the unexpected turn of events is funnier. The further intrusion of figures from Susan's real life with those of her imaginary life—including Bill as bookie ("Honest Bill" is emblazoned on the bag he habitually carries), Muriel as a pregnant maid who serves champagne over frogs (kept in the can near the teapot), clergyman Gerald embracing Andy as "you old devil you" and calling the doctor "Billy Beelzebub himself" (recalling Rick's statement about how his father regarded his girlfriends), and so forth—are hilarious.

By this time, which is near the end of *Woman in Mind*, comedy diminishes more and more, for we perceive Susan's increasing desperation as her mind deteriorates. Before her hallucinatory intermingling of all members of both her families, she cries out to Gerald:

I'm free of all of you now, you see. All of you. You with your prim little, frigid little, narrow-minded little meanness. And that priggish brat who's ashamed of me. Who'd faint at the sight of a pair of tits. As for her with her dead husband. No wonder he died. (*yelling*) What are you hoping for, Muriel? A phantom pregnancy? (*she laughs*) Too late, dear. Too damn late. You and me both. Over the hill.

Such sentiments evoke compassion, not laughter. When, at the end of the play, Susan lapses into total gibberish, Ayckbourn leaves laughter behind. While only compassion remains, this feeling dominates because it had been present earlier, when it mixed with the comic. As Ayckbourn says, "All good comedy should make you cry."<sup>10</sup> He echoes Shaw, who writes that "the finest sort draws a tear along with the laugh."<sup>11</sup>

*Woman in Mind* validates the view of many comic theorists, from Trissino to Bergson and beyond, that, to use William Hazlitt's words, "as long as the disagreeableness of the consequences of a sudden disaster is kept out of sight by the immediate oddity of the circumstances, and the absurdity or unaccountableness of a foolish action is the most striking thing in it, the ludicrous prevails over the pathetic."<sup>12</sup> With superb craftsmanship and a sense of character, Ayckbourn sensitively balances the comically ludicrous and the sympathetically pathetic. In Billington's words, he treats "domestic pain and disaster from the wry standpoint of comedy and with the technical

ingenuity of farce." In his "pained awareness of the unhappiness we inflict on ourselves and on each other," which he dramatizes with great virtuosity, he resembles "a laughing surgeon."<sup>13</sup> His plays may well fulfill Peter Hall's prediction and become staples in the National Theatre's repertoire half a century from now.

<sup>1</sup> D. B. Wyndham Lewis, *Molière: The Comic Mask* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1959), p. 198.

<sup>2</sup> Elmer M. Blistein, "Alan Ayckbourn: Few Jokes, Much Comedy," *Modern Drama*, 26 (Mar. 1983), 26–35; Malcolm Page, "The Serious Side of Alan Ayckbourn," *Modern Drama*, 26 (Mar. 1983), 36–46.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Billington, *Alan Ayckbourn* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Peter Hall's Diaries*, ed. John Goodwin (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ian Watson, *Conversations with Ayckbourn* (London: Macdonald, 1981), pp. 108–09.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Watson, *Conversations with Ayckbourn*, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Collected Plays with Their Prefaces* (New York: Dodd, Mead 1975), I, 376.

<sup>8</sup> For giving me a copy of this script and permission to quote from it, I am grateful to Alan Ayckbourn.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Watson, *Conversations with Ayckbourn*, pp. 120–21.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Billington, *Alan Ayckbourn*, p. 171.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Shaw, "Who I Am, and What I Think" (1901), rpt. *Sixteen Self Sketches* (London: Constable, 1949), p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> William Hazlitt, "On Wit and Humour" (1819), rpt. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, 1973), p. 601.

<sup>13</sup> Billington, *Alan Ayckbourn*, pp. 170–71.

# **The Sweet Dove Died: The Sexual Politics of Narcissism**

MASON COOLEY

Considered from a purely aesthetic point of view, *The Sweet Dove Died* is the most brilliant success of Barbara Pym's career. It lacks the geniality and fun of her earlier work, but it is written with a tense economy that generates greater force than the rather relaxed storytelling of its immediate predecessors, *A Glass of Blessings* and *An Unsuitable Attachment*. During the years of silence, Barbara Pym worked on *The Sweet Dove Died*, cutting, polishing, and recasting with a passion for perfection apparently deepened by her inability to find a publisher. She was never a slack or a casual writer, but after she began publishing in 1950, she wrote quickly and easily enough to bring out a novel every other year for the next decade. When her troubles with publishers began in 1961, she apparently responded in part by adopting a more severe and self-critical artistic standard. The results are *The Sweet Dove Died* and *Quartet in Autumn*, both masterpieces of condensation and lucidity—two qualities that do not often go together. Built on a series of love triangles, the plot of *The Sweet Dove Died* represents tangled and mismatched loves with great conciseness and richness of implication.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest achievement of all in *The Sweet Dove Died* is its remarkable heroine: cold, elegant Leonora Eyre, incapable of passion but capable of heartbreak, strong-willed but finally miserable and helpless in her self-absorption. The exploration of Leonora's character so dominates the book that it might well have been titled *Portrait of a Lady*. Indeed, Leonora shares with James's lady, Isabel Archer, a distaste for sexual relations and disruptive emotion, and like Isabel she mistakes a rather decadent interest in collecting for an aesthetic passion. She is perhaps the Hermione of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* as

seen by a woman, and she has similarities to the mother in James's *Spoils of Poynton*, with her invincible love of beautiful possessions, and her subordination of human relations to them.

The book is a triumph of artistic consistency and economy, yet it is also the coldest and most unforgiving of Barbara Pym's novels. The irony is always verging on the sardonic, and the geniality and high spirits of Pym's earlier work are nowhere in evidence. The mood is one of carefully restrained bitterness, and the portrayal of character bites deeper and reveals more ambivalence than ever before. Not one of the characters is truly likable, yet every one of them except Ned, the American, forces the reader to extend a certain sympathy. Their suffering and self-discontent are just as real as their selfishness.

These qualities are particularly evident in the portrayal of the heroine, Leonora Eyre. Despite her last name, Leonora is almost the reverse of the plain, passionate, and adventurous Jane Eyre who shares her surname. Jane Eyre has a commonplace exterior, underneath which is a fiery imagination and a full heart. Leonora, on the other hand, is an aging beauty of exquisite refinement; the exterior is still beautiful, impeccable, a triumph of taste. The interior, however, is one of emotional poverty, tedious self-absorption, and cautious avoidance of experience.

In her age and situation in life, if not in moral quality, Leonora is similar to other Pym heroines. She is a single woman of good education living on her own as she approaches middle age. She has a private income, so that she does not have to work. And in the course of the book she experiences an unrequited passion for a man. Unlike other Pym heroines, though, she has no contact at all with the Church or, for that matter, with any institution. She seems to be tied to the world only by shopping and by the perfect clothes and furniture that are the fruit of that shopping.

Leonora is a recognizable member of the family of Pym heroines, but she is drawn in much darker colors. The earlier heroines are often prim and excessively concerned with propriety, but they are warm-hearted, generous, and gallant. Leonora is a worshiper of perfection in objects and in people—not moral perfection but perfection of style and appearance, the unflawed vase, the unlined face. Other Pym heroines are alone in the world, and their aloneness impairs their happiness, but not their humanity. Leonora's aloneness is the result of her disdainful indifference to the rest of mankind and her distaste for physical lovemaking. She thinks of herself primarily as someone who wins admiration, but even those who admire her scarcely arouse her liking.

Leonora, then, is a chill-hearted narcissist, and this novel is about the sexual politics of narcissism. The theme is chiefly realized through the character of the heroine, but Leonora's lover James and his subsequent lover Ned are also variations on the theme of narcissism. Determined to live without suffering or strong emotion, Leonora keeps experience at a distance. She dines with elderly admirers who have been trained to look but not touch. She spends her days drifting through antique stores and auction rooms. She sends her friend Humphrey flowers of sympathy when his antique shop is robbed of a few valuable objects, as if someone had died.

The portrait of Leonora is sharpened by a group of surrounding minor characters who serve as foils to the heroine—parallels, contrasts, implicit commentaries. Each of the female characters, simply by being what she is, casts a revealing light on Leonora. The dowdy, middle-aged friend Meg has an abiding maternal love for a gay young man named Colin, who comes to her between lovers and disappears when he is involved with someone. When he is there, she is happy, and when he is away she grieves. When he comes back, she has his favorite Riesling waiting in the fridge, and forgives him. She knows that she needs to love someone, and Colin is her choice, so that she imposes no condition of faithfulness on her love. Leonora coolly turns James away when he returns after just such an escapade; she returns to her first love, her own inviolate self, with some regret that she had permitted James to ruffle her life so disagreeably.

James's girlfriend, Phoebe Sharpe, is a vague, badly dressed young woman who lives in a country village and does literary research. Her house is a jumble of cheap objects, her sink is full of dishes, and a cat appears to live on top of her radio. But she feels a quick sexual passion for James, and despite her timidity, finds the courage to act on it at once. Leonora, all self-command and impeccable taste, is amazed that James could take up with such a tawdry young woman, missing, as usual, whatever might be sexual and human rather than tasteful and suitable.

Leonora's neighbor Liz, after a bitter divorce, spends her time (and her love) on her Siamese cats, which she breeds for competition. She is an angry and disappointed woman whose attachment to life has shrunk down to her cats, but they have the advantage over Leonora's objects and furniture of being alive.

After being abandoned by James, Leonora goes to visit her friend Joan in the country. The visit is less than a success. Joan is immersed in her family, in the party she is giving in the evening, in the gossip and

jokes of her busy world. Leonora is stiff and contemptuous and overdressed at the party, where she has a miserable time out of her London element and the very special conditions she requires. There is no one there to admire her, only an obnoxious woman named Ba, who tells Leonora that she should do some volunteer work.

Leonora is more intelligent and more self-aware than any of these women characters, but intelligence and self-awareness are of little avail. The other women love something living: a gay boy, a Siamese cat, a pipe-smoking husband and noisy children. All Leonora has is a few memories of youthful flirtations in the great gardens of Europe, flirtations that somehow came to nothing. In large measure by her choice, her inner world is mausoleum-like, though by no means free of waves of anxiety.

Into this unoccupied life comes an elderly antique dealer, Humphrey Boyce, and his sexually ambiguous young nephew James. The opening scene is a book auction. Leonora has been bidding for a pretty Victorian flower book, one made for a love-token. Appropriately, Leonora plans to make it a present to herself. Overcome by the excitement of bidding, the bad air, and the crowded room, Leonora almost faints. The uncle and nephew rescue the distressed lady, and the three go off for lunch at a good restaurant. The pickup has been executed quickly and efficiently, but within the rules of Edwardian gentility. The delicacy of the lady and the gallantry of the gentlemen have made the contact easy rather than difficult, because the players know the rules and how to use them. They have no need to resort to the uncertainties of spontaneous reactions.

The first scene of the novel introduces us to a world where the artifice prevails over nature. The characters speak and act for effect—to project an image, to negotiate some kind of emotional deal. Seldom do any of the central characters do anything merely from impulse or conviction, except when surprised into it by sexual passion. Here are the first paragraphs of the novel:

"The sale room is no place for a woman," declared Humphrey Boyce, as he and his nephew James sat having lunch with the attractive stranger they had picked up at a Bond Street sale room half an hour ago.

"Now you're scolding me," said Leonora, with mock humility. "I know it was stupid of me, but I suppose it was the excitement of bidding—for the first time in my life—and then getting that dear little book. It was just too overwhelming."

"And the room was so hot," James suggested, trying to take his part in the conversation, for after all it was he who had

noticed the woman in black sway sideways and almost collapse at her moment of triumph, when she had challenged the auctioneer's rather bored "Twenty pounds at the table?" with a cry of "Twenty-five!" Between them James and Humphrey had supported her out of the sale room and after that it seemed the natural thing for the three of them to be having lunch together.<sup>2</sup>

These three characters have just taken an initiative very much against the conventions of British decorum. They have violated the rule implied by one of an Englishman's proudest remarks, "I keep myself to myself." They have made a public pickup of a stranger. In the subsequent conversation each falls back on a conventional posture that reassuringly obliterates the unconventional nature of what has just taken place. Humphrey says, in a heavy, old-fashioned, masculine way, "The sale room is no place for a woman." Courtly and pompous, kind but more than a little condescending, he is the old-fashioned Edwardian gentleman who knows how to treat a lady.

Leonora's girlish trill responds appropriately to his basso. When she says, "Now you're scolding me," she is playing at submission as he is playing at masterfulness. The two middle-aged people fall into a stylized pattern of flirtation, long sanctioned by tradition. The man plays the rescuer and the mentor; the woman plays the adorable but fragile little woman. This stereotyped erotic play is one of the ironies of the novel: in the ensuing power struggles Leonora has a certain ruthless competence in pursuing her erotic goal of capturing young James, and Humphrey stands by comparatively helpless. By her speech Leonora also gives us a foretaste of her collector's passion for ownership of beautiful objects, her delight in admiration, her physical fragility, her ostentatious "sensibility," and her tough ability to manage situations.

Young James has no period style to fall back on, and no imagination to tell him what to do. All he can contribute to the situation is his extreme good looks and a flat statement of fact, "And the room was so hot." As he is to be the cipher over whom others contend, he is appropriately passive and untalkative.

This first incident sets up a triangle in which none of the attractions match. Humphrey is attracted to Leonora, who cultivates him in order to get at his nephew. Leonora is attracted to James as a flirtatious son whom she can captivate with comforts and attentions. James likes Leonora well enough, but he will also sneak off to his sexual lovers, first a woman, then a man. The erotic merry-go-round of Viennese bedroom farce is adapted to the more restrained conditions of British high comedy; the comedy of opening and closing bedroom and closet

doors is replaced by the mental acrobatics of lovers who spend much of their time waiting and watching one another.

None of these attractions is predominantly sexual; the motives have to do more with possession and display than with genital love. Humphrey likes Leonora because she is someone elegant to be seen with at the opera and in fashionable restaurants. Leonora likes James because he is so handsome and so seemingly easy to manipulate, and because he does not make any of the sexual demands that she dreads. James likes Leonora because she uses all her taste and tact to flatter him and serve him. Of the three, only Leonora feels something close to passion, and even she never comes close to self-abandonment, or even to an active desire for sexual union. Only in one outburst of weeping does she ever venture outside the fortress-prison of her self-control.

Until meeting James, Leonora has never gone beyond mild courtships. She has reached middle age without getting past a virginal playing at love, coquetting in a perfectly ladylike way with decorous suitors. James rouses her as no one ever has. Past forty, she finds his youth magical, and she is enchanted to be a combination of mother and glamorous older woman respectfully adored by a perfect son-lover-friend. James receives her love offerings with detachment and slight surprise, a response he generally accords to the love offerings inspired by his good looks. With the almost innocent egotism of youth, James finds nothing remarkable about Leonora's lavish attentions. Both are relieved that no physical relationship is expected, and they are free to play at "adoring" one another. Leonora is delighted by James's humdrum conversation, and her delight makes him feel, a little uncertainly, that he may indeed be more interesting than he had imagined.

Driven by her desire for secure possession of James, Leonora becomes both less idle and more ruthless. Finding that James plans to move from his present flat, Leonora decides to drive out the elderly tenant from the upstairs flat of her house and redecorate it for James. Miss Foxe, the elderly gentlewoman, was, as it turns out, already planning to move, so that Leonora does not need to put her out. This is a typical Barbara Pym development. In her novels, the worst that happens is that someone forms a wicked intention. But usually events take a turn that prevents the wicked intention from being carried out or, if the plans are carried out, the result is not as bad as might be expected. So there are villainous intentions but few villainous deeds in Barbara Pym. Her morally deficient characters suffer enough from their selfishness and emptiness; the author avoids adding the burden of

guilt for real misdeeds. The suffering consequent on being what they are is sufficient for Barbara Pym's comic purposes. Extremes of badness and goodness have no place in her measured and middling world. Thus Leonora is perfectly willing to play the wicked landlady, but circumstances prevent her from acting on her intentions.<sup>3</sup>

When Leonora discovers that James has a girlfriend, Phoebe Sharpe, to whom he has loaned some furniture while he is traveling in Europe, she uses Humphrey to force the return of the furniture. She succeeds in driving James's young woman away, but the job is easy because James's attachment is a feeble one, and vague, uncertain Phoebe is no match for Leonora. Indeed, Phoebe is a perfect foil for Leonora. She is very young, badly dressed, housed in a messy overgrown cottage, eager to make love, undefended against her emotions, too unfocused to scheme or manipulate. She doesn't have a chance in a contest with Leonora, yet the vague, vulnerable way she wanders through life has a certain emotional reality that is lacking in the chill existence of Leonora.

Having driven out her tenant, defeated James's girlfriend, and most important of all, gained possession of the furniture, Leonora turns her upstairs flat into a place of perfect comfort and taste for James. James is again a little surprised, but accepts the tribute with perfect equanimity, as part of the general tendency of life to take care of him. For a time, they play a game of loving housemates, ideal friends, imaginary parent and child.

The flimsy nature of this arrangement promptly becomes evident when James is seduced by a sexually accomplished young American named Ned, on sabbatical leave in England. Leonora is a sentimental narcissist, and James is a passive one. The narcissism of Ned, however, is a cold and clear-eyed drive for power. For him, the chief interest of getting involved with James is to separate him from Leonora, just to show that he can do it. Without much difficulty, Ned persuades James to move out of Leonora's house. Leonora is bereft:

The days seemed long and hopeless and Leonora began to wish she had not given up working, for a routine job would at least have filled the greater part of the day. Yet she lacked the energy and initiative to find herself an occupation; she remembered the dreadful woman she had met at the Murray's party and the impertinent suggestion she had made about the useful voluntary work one could do. But when Leonora came to consider them each had something wrong with it: how could she do church work when she never went near a church, or work for old people when she found them boring and physically repellent,

or with handicapped children when the very thought of them was too upsetting. (p. 181)

The solution to her loneliness is her possessions:

She had always cared as much for inanimate objects as for people and now spent hours looking after her possessions, washing the china and cleaning the silver obsessively and rearranging them in her rooms. The shock of finding James had taken the fruitwood mirror upset her quite disproportionately.... (p. 182)

The new triangle of Ned, James, and Leonora replaces the triangle of Phoebe, James, and Leonora. In this match it is Leonora who is the losing player. After having defeated Phoebe, she is in turn defeated. Her genteel strategies are no match for the steely expertise of Ned in erotic intrigues. Her only resource is to try to maintain her stoicism so that Ned cannot see, directly at least, the extent of her suffering.

Ned makes others suffer, as he admits with an unconvincing display of regret. If someone is to suffer a narcissistic wound, he will make sure it will not be himself. When he senses a slight restiveness on James's part, Ned determines to reject James before James rejects him. Ned quickly finds a series of other lovers, and then, announcing that his mother needs him, returns to America. Before he leaves, he shamelessly calls on Leonora and offers to send James back. She coolly declines. At this point Ned and Leonora are roughly equal antagonists. James, the prize over whom they have struggled, is so inept even in his efforts to keep his various loves hidden from one another, that he scarcely qualifies as a player.

The Ned-James-Leonora episode of the book has a heartless brilliance, wit, and perversity that suggest Restoration comedy with its rakes and dissolute ladies in their dance-like changes of partners and their delight in deception. Restoration comedy suggests that all these intrigues, though doubtless brutal and immoral, are highly entertaining. *The Sweet Dove Died* presents this triangle as filled with a fascinating and amusing perversity, but it also renders the suffering and aching feeling of loss beneath the surface of the love intrigue. Comedy usually keeps suffering in the background, but this comedy is shot through with Leonora's anguish. She turns out to be more adept at suffering than at love.

With the departure of Ned, the original triangle of James-Leonora-Humphrey is reestablished. After waiting so patiently for Leonora's infatuation with James to end, Humphrey wins, whatever winning may mean when Leonora is the prize. After an unsatisfactory meeting with James, Leonora finds herself weary of her position as admirer and

decides to go back to her old, comfortable, undemanding position as the one who is courted and admired. Here is the last paragraph of the novel:

The sight of Humphrey with the peonies reminded her that he was taking her to the Chelsea Flower Show tomorrow. It was the kind of thing one liked to go to, and the sight of such large and faultless blooms, so exquisite in colour, so absolutely correct in all their finer points, was a comfort and satisfaction to one who loved perfection as she did. Yet, when one came to think of it, the only flowers that were really perfect were those, like the peonies that went so well with one's charming room, that possessed the added grace of having been presented to oneself. (p. 208)

*The Sweet Dove Died* is the least lovable of Barbara Pym's books, but it is also her most perfect work of art. Like Jane Austen's *Emma*, it has a heroine whom most people dislike. Leonora is fascinating but unsympathetic; indeed none of the characters offer much of an opening to sympathy. The self-satisfied doltishness of the men makes us keep our distance from them, and even Leonora's courage in her love-sufferings has something repellent about it. Driven back from sympathy, we are forced to deal with this book through our intelligence. Emotion held in check, we contemplate this picture of a skittish, anxious world of attenuated passions and faithless relationships, a world in which no one finally connects with anyone else and no emotion completes itself. The protagonist is left alone at her mirror with an empty heart, and that is the picture of chill unhappiness that stays with the reader.

*The Sweet Dove Died* may not have lovable characters, but as a whole it has a power and beauty that increase on rereading. The novel itself provides an emblem of its artistic character: the small Japanese toggles called netsuke. Humphrey sells them in his antique shop; James and Leonora admire them. Their dentist collects them. Netsuke are bits of wood, ivory, or metal with realistic, fiercely energetic little figures carved into them. Small as they are, they give an impression of power and completeness, a life that is about to burst out of the confines of these little objects that are attached to kimono sashes. They resemble that "little bit of ivory, two inches wide," on which Jane Austen described herself as working. Barbara Pym powerfully inscribes her unyielding message within the confines of a short comic novel. Compact, intense with life, complete—that is the essence of *The Sweet Dove Died*.

<sup>1</sup> The reviews of the novel recognized its brilliance and its modernity, though they did not quite acknowledge the extent of its difference from the earlier novels or the way the heroine both embodies and transforms the traits of earlier Pym heroines. Writing one of the best reviews in *Newsweek* on April 16, 1979, Walter Clemons said, "The Sweet Dove Died is lethally funny and subtly, very pronouncedly sensual to a degree new in Pym's work . . . . Leonora's pride is pitilessly anatomized; her lonely elegance compels sympathy. This is a brilliant, perfect piece of work." Susannah Clapp, writing in *TLS*, July 7, 1978, notes the "modernity" of the sexual themes, "a sudden lustful lunge by Humphrey . . . and versatile dalliance by James, who tangles first with a peaky and eager girl, afterwards with a manipulative homosexual."

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Pym, *The Sweet Dove Died* (New York: Harper and Row Perennial Library Paperback Edition, 1980), p. 7. Subsequent quotations are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> The closest parallel to Leonora's plan to drive Miss Foxe out occurs in *Excellent Women*: Allegra Gray plans to drive her future sister-in-law out of the vicarage after she marries Julian Malory, but the engagement is broken off and Winifred is left undisturbed. The theme of bad intentions coming to little is usually embodied in male characters all too willing to make women fall in love with them without any return of love. The women are saved from deep suffering by their recognition of the moral paltriness of their beloveds: Archdeacon Hoccleve in the first novel published in Barbara Pym's lifetime, *Some Tame Gazelle*, exemplifies this theme, as does Graham Pettifer in *A Few Green Leaves*, the last novel. And almost every novel has some male who fancies himself the object of a hopeless passion, not realizing that his female admirer regards him with a certain saving irony.

# The Short Fiction of Barbara Pym

ANTHONY KAUFMAN

"I always find a certain interest in people who are failures or deprived or in some way unsuccessful," Barbara Pym said in a BBC interview.<sup>1</sup> Readers of her novels will know the type at once—those, especially women, who have not led "full lives": the unwanted, the rejected; those who must settle for spinsterhood, good works, helping at church, parish works, and all that. Her published novels take such persons and make from their failure and loneliness a rich and serious comedy. Barbara Pym herself struggled through feelings of personal and professional failure. An unsatisfactory love affair at Oxford seemed to haunt her throughout her life, although she made from it some of her best fictional material. Readers of her diaries may see how badly she was hurt by her sudden, unexpected, and somewhat abrupt rejection by the publisher Jonathan Cape after her first six novels had received a satisfactory reception. When in 1977 she was rediscovered (the story of the famous *TLS* article is now well known) she received at last both in the United Kingdom and in the United States the recognition she deserved.

Her novels are now widely read, but it is not generally known that she wrote throughout her life more than thirty pieces of short fiction, as well as several unpublished novels.<sup>2</sup> These typescripts are deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, Barbara Pym's own university, for which she felt a deep affinity and sense of nostalgia. It is curious upon reading Pym's literary notebooks and diaries at the Bodleian to find her very early planning to donate her "works"—at that time nonexistent—to

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I wish to thank Barbara Pym's literary executor, Hazel Holt, for permission to quote from unpublished typescripts at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the *New Yorker* magazine for permission to quote from "Across a Crowded Room."

the great library. Her tone is of course joking, but throughout the diaries one finds wry references to her future biographers and critics.<sup>3</sup>

My purpose here is to demonstrate how this preoccupation with kinds of failure can be seen repeatedly in the short fiction of Barbara Pym, where she often creates a protagonist who in one way or another must settle for something less than what is satisfactory or even necessary. As in the published novels, Pym creates, almost obsessively, the woman who "must settle." Running as a continual pattern throughout these stories is the dramatization of how memory and fantasy so often must take the place of actuality, how memory and fantasy are indeed at the center of emotional life and necessary to it. In demonstrating this pattern, I wish to suggest that Barbara Pym's work goes beyond the relatively modest claims that have been made in her behalf to dramatize important human questions. For some years now, since her rediscovery, she has been credited as a superior maker of high comedy; her detachment and wit have quite appropriately been acknowledged. But in the stories I shall discuss, while the ironic comedy she does so well is often present, there are repetitive patterns that extend beyond what has been taken to be "very Barbara Pym" and these must be seen clearly, for they appear again in the published novels and are central to her creative imagination.<sup>4</sup>

The stories, written over a period of years, are varied, and it must be said at once that Barbara Pym's short stories are uneven in quality; they lack the consistent achievement of the published novels. A number of her stories were written for the popular women's magazines and they are on the whole disappointing. But several of the stories are superior and attractive. The devoted reader of Barbara Pym will find almost all of them interesting; two are directly autobiographical—"Miss Pym" herself appears. Several offer characters familiar to readers from the published novels and may give a somewhat different perspective on them. Jessie Morrow, Miss Doggett, Mark and Sophia Ainger (and their cat Faustina), Ned, of *The Sweet Dove Died*, appear. But almost all of the short fiction portrays, as do the published novels, the need to love and the consequences of love's failure; the loneliness of the single woman; the sense of lost opportunity; the self-consciousness of middle age. I include in this study of the short fiction one of Barbara Pym's several radio plays: "Something to Remember."

A main preoccupation of Pym's novels, both published and unpublished, may be summed up by the title of her first published novel, *Some Tame Gazelle*, with its suggestion that her story concerns the complex of emotions implied by the verses, "Some tame gazelle, or

some gentle dove: / Something to love, oh, something to love!" Pym's fiction concerns the need for love, so often foiled or mishandled or impossible or lost. Often her characters must settle for life without fulfillment; the theme of "something to love" often involves feelings of emptiness, of "not having," recognized by Letty, of *Quartet in Autumn*, who "had never really had anything much." She is reduced to wondering "might not the experience of 'not having' be regarded as something with its own validity?"<sup>5</sup> Pym's novels then are of a piece and it is not surprising to see the same theme running throughout her short stories, written (as were her novels) over the length of her adult life. This theme is seen perhaps most clearly and simply in the story "The Day the Music Came."

Juliana lives life at second hand. Apparently an office worker, she lunches by herself, which can be pleasant if one has an interesting book, "but sometimes people got in the way and you couldn't concentrate, but would wonder about them, who they were, why they came here and what they talked about."<sup>6</sup> Her usual restaurant reflects her own life; it is full of dim people. The story begins when she notices an interesting-looking man, who reminds her of a picture of an unknown eighteenth-century gentleman in the National Gallery. He is usually accompanied by an older woman with a voice of "superior quality" whom Juliana comes to think of as "mother." She begins to imagine his life: he is a stockbroker, married, living in outer suburbia. He takes the same train to town each morning with the same others, the stockbrokers, solicitors, and bank clerks, "cracking the same little jokes to fit in with the changing seasons, each with his bowler hat and neat, flat dispatch case . . ." (fol. 119). His wife? A mousy little woman, pretty but rather faded: "Juliana felt that she was called Muriel and was sometimes, like 'mother,' a little querulous" (fol. 119). There are children: a boy and a girl, rather nebulous in Juliana's fantasy. Not really a very interesting story Juliana concludes and she decides that she will not go into that restaurant again.

But she does. She forgets the suburban house of her fantasy and remembers only the resemblance to the unknown eighteenth-century gentleman. Certainly such a person could not be dull. When she sees him at the restaurant he seems on one occasion to be looking in her direction and "It was as if he felt at once irritated and flattered by her interest" (fol. 122). But what can come of all this? It seems that Juliana must go on with her mild interest and fantasies indefinitely.

One afternoon, however, music comes in the form of some "rather grey-looking middle-aged men carrying musical instruments and

winding their way among the tables to the little platform at the dark end of the room" (fol. 122). There is to be "eating music" for the diners and Juliana feels that this makes her situation "at once romantic and ridiculous" (fol. 123). But she herself is unsettled by "a movement of a Rachmaninoff piano concerto, rather badly played" (fol. 123). And glancing over to the unknown man it appears that he too feels something, as he smiles neither at "mother" nor at Juliana, but merely in contemplation. Disturbed by feelings not fully understood, she drifts toward the counter where cooked foods are sold. There, suddenly, she encounters the man. Here is the crucial moment; he is obviously going to speak to her. But she shrinks from the encounter: "She stood for a moment and gaped at him, then fled into the first place of refuge that offered itself, a kind of cafeteria, where she found a tin tray being thrust into her hands" (fol. 123-24). Dazed, she drifts down the line picking up the bits and pieces of an absurd second lunch. She is frightened and confused:

There was no sign of him here, for he would hardly have followed her when she had shown so plainly that she did not want to speak to him. That she could not bear to speak to him, that was really it. For whatever could they have said to each other? And how could she ever have been so foolish as to suppose that he looked like that unknown eighteenth-century gentleman, when he was so obviously just an ordinary man who came up from some suburb every morning and went back every evening? She had made such a fool of herself that she could probably never come here again. (fol. 124-25)

Here Juliana's story ends, for the narrative follows the man as he trains back to suburbia. The switch of focus is somewhat abrupt, but it is amusing to find that Juliana's fantasy is accurate; his life is almost exactly as she had fantasized—suburban, a wife (Madge, not Muriel), children, train up and train down with all the same people. "Perhaps it was just as well, he thought, as he unfolded his evening paper in the train. She had looked rather interesting, but whatever could they have said to each other? That was no way to begin an acquaintance and how could it have gone on? Madge and the children . . . quite impossible" (fol. 125). He concludes that "There hadn't really been anything in it—it was the music, really, a bit unsuitable at lunchtime" (fol. 126). He might take mother elsewhere next Friday; she had complained that the music was rather loud. The implication is that he will return with unsatisfied feelings to mild suburban felicity.

Juliana's feelings are also mixed. Her desires are real, though suppressed, but when fantasy becomes, or is about to become, actuality,

she flees. Juliana turns away from the romance she craves largely through a failure of nerve and her self-conscious sense of the absurd. Romance in the cafeteria indeed! She prefers to live out her life through her lunchtime book and her imaginative excursions into the lives of others. Here is a pattern that recurs in Pym's fiction, both the stories and the novels. The centrality of fantasy (and as we shall see, its imaginative counterpart, memory) to the leading female figures in Pym is remarkable. The essence of the story is so often a sharply defined opposition between fantasy and reality; the story reaches a climax at that point at which the female protagonist is forced to confront the opposition—make some choice. And typically, her decision (or, more accurately, emotional imperative) is to turn away from reality, to choose fantasy. Juliana's elaborate self-created fantasy is necessary to her: familiar, noncommittal, safe, somewhat amusing, and to an extent emotionally fulfilling.

"The Day the Music Came" was rejected by a "women's magazine," *Woman and Beauty*, in March 1950, the fiction editor having complained that Barbara Pym creates "situations," not plots. The editor calls for strong plots, and suggests "that you are just a shade too objective, too watchful." In return, Barbara Pym wrote "I am afraid that all my stories tend to be of the 'situation' rather than the 'movement and action' type—it is just the way one sees things, which is very difficult, probably impossible, to alter very much."<sup>7</sup> A similar sense of living romance through self-created fantasy occurs in the story "Goodbye, Balkan Capital!" but here the situation is more complicated. In her diary entry for Friday, July 4, 1941, Barbara Pym notes that "I have written a story called 'Goodbye, Balkan Capital' which I have sent to *Penguin New Writing*, but three weeks have passed and I have heard nothing."<sup>8</sup> A penciled notation on the typescript says "Rejected by Penguin New Writing, 1941." The story derives in part from Barbara Pym's own service during the period at a first-aid post.<sup>9</sup> Laura Arling, a middle-aged spinster, lives in a small country town. German bombers headed toward Liverpool are a constant anxiety. Laura seems somewhat of an anachronism amid "the horrors of total war in nineteen forty one" (MS. Pym 94, fol. 246). She is suggestive of the world pre-1914. We see her first as the radio blares out news of the war; she stands arranging flowers in a bowl:

She was dim and faded, with a face that might once have been pretty in her distant Edwardian youth. It was an unfashionable face, but somehow nostalgic and restful in a world so full of brutality and death. If anyone troubled to look at her they might

say that she had a sweet expression, if, indeed, that phrase is ever used seriously now. (fols. 246-47)

She is a contrast to her sister Janet, brusque, realistic, somewhat formidable in her green WSA uniform. In contrast to the dreamy and introspective Laura, Janet is strong and efficient—a contrast Barbara Pym uses in several stories and the novel *Some Tame Gazelle*, where she contrasts the Bede sisters in a somewhat similar manner.

As the radio tells of the German occupation of a Balkan capital, Laura remembers that this particular city is the post of Crispin, with whom she shared her one and only romantic encounter before the war in Oxford. They had gone to a Commemoration Ball and had defied propriety by staying out all night. "It had been like a dream, walking down the Banbury road [sic] in the early morning sunshine, wearing her white satin ball gown and holding Crispin's hand" (fol. 248). They never met again, and exchanged no letters, but memory contains all the happiness, "enshrined in all its detail like those Victorian paperweights which show a design of flowers under glass . . ." (fol. 249). It is this memory of a single night which represents to Laura her one moment of young womanhood and romance. She has loved no one else and has now grown into middle age. She retains a romanticized image of Crispin as a diplomat, always amidst the excitement and picturesque aspects of foreign service. In her memory he is always young: "For she could not think of him as fat or bald, the brightness of his hazel eyes dimmed or hidden behind spectacles, his voice querulous. . . . Devouring Time might blunt the Lion's paws; these things could happen to other people, but not to Crispin" (fol. 250).

She has lived an isolated life, emotionally imprisoned first by her father, an archdeacon, along with her North Oxford aunts, and now by Janet in their small country town. She lives through richly detailed fantasy, especially that of an ever-young Crispin, in the exciting places, amidst the glamor of international capitals. As she hears news of the British exodus from the unnamed Balkan capital (the Balkan state has signed the Axis Pact), she imagines Crispin in shirt sleeves, burning the codebooks, destroying bulky secret documents, doing something really important.

The central section of the story tells of Laura's night at the First Aid Post. Duty there provides an outlet for Laura, who feels a little important with her freshly painted tin helmet and darkened flashlight. All social types and classes join at the Post; there is excited conversation, and all is jolly and friendly. Laura wonders what her strict father and

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mother would have thought of her mixing with such types: "Perhaps it was a good thing that they had not been spared to see it" (fol. 255).

In the silence of the late night, she thinks again about Crispin and imagines his flight via some romantic luxury train like the Orient Express through Europe to Moscow or Istanbul—looking through important documents, perhaps even dictating to a secretary. She imagines the abandoned Legation, with drawers open and empty, out-of-date newspapers on the floor, and the fireplace cold, stuffed with the dead ashes of the codebooks and secret documents: "it was 'Goodbye, Balkan Capital!' and the train rushing through the darkness" (fol. 257). At home, early in the morning, she feels great pleasure in the cool sheets after a night on duty and as she falls into sleep she fantasizes about Crispin's Moscow, "All those curiously shaped domes and towers, the Kremlin, Lenin embalmed . . ." (fol. 259).

Laura, following the radio news, eventually learns that the British delegation has returned from Moscow, and she is awed by the magnitude of such a voyage across Europe. She wonders if Crispin has a house in London and where it is. She wonders if it has been bombed, and she studies the papers to see what parts of London have been destroyed.

While doing this one day, she comes unexpectedly upon Crispin's obituary. She is shocked to find that her fantasies concerning him are ludicrously mistaken. She learns that he had retired from the diplomatic service five years earlier, and has died at the house of his sister in Oxfordshire. The account ends with "three dry words. 'He was unmarried'" (fol. 260). She realizes that at the back of her mind there may have been hope that one day Crispin would return to England "and the romantic first meeting would happen all over again" (fol. 260).

Eventually Laura finds herself "grieving not so much for his death, as that could make no practical difference to her, but for the picture she had had of him" (fol. 260). Her exotic pictures of danger, flight, and romance now seem a little foolish when all the time he had been perfectly safe in a village, his life perhaps as dull as hers. She feels a little desolate. He might even have been an Air Raid Warden. She regards this possibility "with amusement and dismay." She cuts out the obituary, the only tangible souvenir she has of Crispin. Her fantasies have been idiotic and she feels that she has been well served for her "self-indulgent dreaming." Perhaps her own end will be more exciting and romantic than his.

But finally she realizes that such an end would be wrong. It was always the imaginary Crispin who lived a full life and Laura does not

want it to be different. "In life or in death people are very much what we like to think them" (fol. 261). She might search in the Oxfordshire churchyard among the new graves to find Crispin's, but finally for her he would always be a romantic image, in the Balkans, in the dangerous places.

"Goodbye, Balkan Capital!" manifests once again a dominant pattern seen in Barbara Pym's fiction. Often we find the need for love fulfilled through memory and the reluctance to alter the sense of permanence and excitement memory affords. Here a memory of several crucial hours leads to elaborate, satisfying, and durable fantasy. Crispin is associated with life in movement, forward from the Balkans east and then across a dangerous Europe back to England. The Crispin of real life was no doubt dull and imperfect, but his remembered image offers the chance to lead "a full life," even if at second hand. The permanence of memory, its importance in one's emotional life, its elaboration into fantasy, the final irrelevance of the actual quality of the imagined other, form a strong and central concern in Barbara Pym's fiction. This dwelling upon (even the insistence upon) memory and fantasy is found as a motif throughout Pym's diaries and it seems to derive from her traumatic love affair as an undergraduate. It is of course central to the highly autobiographical novel *Some Tame Gazelle*, where Belinda Bede's relationship with Archdeacon Hoccleve depends greatly on her remembrance of him as he was many years earlier.

A story closely allied to "Goodbye, Balkan Capital!" in theme is the short radio play "Something to Remember."<sup>10</sup> Miss Gossett is the daughter of a vicar, who finds after her father's death that she must hire out as a paid companion. Edith has affinities both to Juliana and to Laura, for her story is that of a single romantic encounter which shapes a life through memory, and of romantic opportunity abruptly refused. The form of a radio play allows Pym to develop her characters entirely through the play of voices. Lavinia and Christopher, niece and nephew to Miss Lomax, an imperious dowager very much in the manner of Miss Doggett of *Jane and Prudence*, discuss Miss Gossett, the unobtrusive, ever-helpful companion to their aunt. What has her life been—has she in her featureless life had something of importance, something to remember? Lavinia tells Christopher the story of Miss Gossett, and this frame introduces a series of vignettes from Edith's life. Early in the play Miss Gossett describes herself as all too ordinary. "'If I were an object you might send me to a rummage sale.'"<sup>11</sup> Edith knows that she has for some people a certain period charm. Like Laura, she is associated with the past. "'Yes, yes, that's just what I mean,'" says the rather precious

Christopher, "she goes with all that delicious Victorian and Edwardian bric-a-brac" (fol. 219). Her life has been one of service; Lavinia says "she was the vicar's daughter, always doing things for other people, even when she was quite young" (fol. 219). The drama then fades into the past, to a garden party where Edith acts as the ever-polite and dutiful daughter; then to the crucial romantic encounter at the home of the local aristocrats, the Sheldons. The son, Simon, twenty-one and something of an experienced ladies' man, flirts with Edith. We understand that nothing can come of this; Simon is destined for the Diplomatic Service and a good career, which will of course mean an appropriately good marriage. Simon invites Edith to Eight Week at Oxford, but we next hear Edith's letter of refusal; her father is seriously ill and Edith cannot attend. Simon's response is professionally cordial and sympathetic, but Edith does not hear from him again.

When she learns, years later, that Simon has returned to England from his diplomatic post to stand as the local Conservative candidate in a parliamentary election, Edith makes a point of volunteering to help with committee work. Her motives are ambiguous. Simon after twenty years is still the focal point of her emotional life. Will he remember her—has he changed? They meet briefly at the committee rooms and Simon cannot at first place her. Abruptly and unnoticed she flees the room. Later that day, he unexpectedly comes to Miss Lomax's house to visit Edith. Her greeting is cool, her tone reserved, indeed slightly hostile. As he speaks of his travel—Buenos Aires, Peking, Budapest—we are aware of her resentment of him, her feelings that she too should have had a "full life," perhaps with him, instead of the imprisonment of a life of dependency. But if earlier she felt drawn to meet him, her desire now is to withdraw. She declines a longer talk the next day: "Oh, you wouldn't have time and I don't suppose I would either. Besides, what would be the use?" (fol. 227). Our anticipation that he has come in order to renew the feelings of that distant moment at Sheldonian Towers is crushed, almost with comic effect, when he announces the real reason for his visit: to hire a companion for his mother. "You're such a nice, sensible person, and not too young . . ." (fol. 227).<sup>12</sup>

The moment has parallels in Pym's published novels. In Chapter Twenty-Four of *Excellent Women*, for example, Rocky Napier seems to be on the point of some significant declaration to the waiting Mildred Lathbury, but instead asks only for afternoon tea—there the effect is comic, if a little sad. In "Something to Remember," there is little in the way of laughter. Edith refers obliquely to that evening some twenty years past. Simon does not understand, and when asked to explain,

Edith says only "Some things can't be explained or they melt away" (fol. 228). The interview ends with formal goodbyes. Later, in a rather obvious irony, Miss Lomax suggests that Edith will be able to say that she once knew an MP—that will be something to remember.

The something to remember is of course no more than an event of several hours' duration in the distant past. Edith's attachment, like that of Laura Arling, is to a shadow. Crispin and Simon are public men; they move, their lives go forward. The women are static; they are imprisoned both by circumstance and by their reliance on memory. The men are of the present. The women are associated with an earlier, more genteel period. The link between the man and woman is a past encounter, dimly remembered, if at all, by the man, and central and all-important to the woman, who saves and stores it away. "Something to Remember" ends with a return to the frame—the two young people. Christopher, who remarks that Henry James would have made something wonderful out of the final interview between Simon and Edith, seems to understand and sympathize with "Gossy's" situation, and we understand that her life will be "not full."

Edith Gossett may stand as Barbara Pym's representative spinster, the embodiment of a figure important to Pym: "the excellent woman." She lives a life of service, dim, hardly noticed, living at second hand, often fixated on memory. But such women are often redeemed from gloom by a sense of humor, of the absurd, by cheerfulness and a keen eye for observation, especially when it comes to the comic imperfections of oneself and others.

Perhaps one of the best stories concerning the excellent woman is "English Ladies."<sup>13</sup> Here Barbara Pym again uses a favorite contrast; she portrays two middle-aged spinsters, who represent opposite types. Eleanor and Dorothy are civil servants on a tour of Spain. Old companions, they remind one of Mildred Lathbury and Dora Caldicote of *Excellent Women* (especially in that episode in which they visit a monastery), or Belinda and Harriet Bede of *Some Tame Gazelle*. Dorothy is aggressively English; she shares Dora Caldicote's hostile fascination with Roman Catholicism. But the focus of the story is on Eleanor, the more introspective and open of the two. Both she and her friend are of an age, she acknowledges, when one accepts one's limitations. Her momentary thoughts about escaping civilization, of living like peasants, "how much more exciting life would be" (fol. 148), are dismissed. She wakes after an afternoon nap and glances over at Dorothy's bed, where her friend has fallen asleep over a woman's glossy magazine. The page is open to a holiday picture of a beautiful young couple in a romantic

attitude. "Well, nothing like that will happen on *our* holiday, Eleanor told herself, sensibly and without regret. One did not expect that kind of thing any more and it made life easier" (fol. 150). Here is a motif in Pym, so often expressed in the phrase "All passion spent." How frequently the Pymian woman, Belinda Bede of *Some Tame Gazelle*, for example, sees, or attempts to see, the loss of romantic possibilities as a means to tranquillity, a compensation for the limits of middle age. And yet, like many of these same women, there is in Eleanor a vague anticipation of *something*—all passion is not quite spent.

Awake, she notices a grave little Spanish boy of about five at the window of a block of flats opposite her hotel. He watches the English ladies silently, without motion: "He was staring into their room, his dark solemn eyes fixed on her" (fol. 150). Eleanor feels uneasy; should she acknowledge his presence? Later, as she and Dorothy sit in a "Tea Room," amidst the sound of North Country English voices, both women feel themselves to be English women abroad, "with white shoes and handbags and pale patterned cotton dresses that did not fit tightly enough. Even their hair and faces looked all one colour, a washed-out beige or grey" (fol. 152). This situation, a sudden realization of one's own dimness in contrast to romantic persons or places, is often seen in Barbara Pym. In the short story "A Few Days before the Winter" (MS. Pym 92, fols. 166-82), Miss Potter and Miss Dokes, a "couple of schoolmistresses on holiday," visit a dull little tourist hotel. Miss Potter experiences a strong sense of her own unsatisfactory presence upon observing an obviously sophisticated, attractive woman in the hotel lounge. "The stranger disturbed her a little, made her feel dowdy and provincial in her flowered rayon afternoon dress, and her gin and lime a girlish, unsophisticated drink, the kind of thing women accustomed to drinking only with other women might order" (fol. 167).<sup>14</sup>

In "English Ladies," Eleanor, aware of her own colorlessness, thinks suddenly of the dark-eyed children playing on the beach and unexpectedly bursts out rather emotionally: "'How beautiful all these dark people are . . . especially the children!'" (fol. 152). She is embarrassed at her extravagance. But in the days that follow, Eleanor finds the local children a continual delight. She sees the little boy at the window day after day. He never speaks or smiles, but stares at them gravely. Eleanor begins to regret that she never married and had children of her own, and even considers—not really seriously—the possibility of adopting a dark-eyed war orphan.

Meanwhile, Dorothy "found that there was something disturbing and exciting about being in a Catholic country" (fol. 153). Church bells,

the mass, "that dark, sinister word that Dorothy could hardly bring herself to pronounce" (fol. 153). The shops "full of rosaries and statues, and the churches, so dark and mysterious, with unintelligible services going on all the time, it seemed. And the priests . . ." (fol. 153-54).

The afternoon they are to leave, Eleanor once again sees the sober little boy, and experiences ambivalent feelings. She wishes that she had bought some sort of present for him, "but in a curious way she did not want the contact that would make him become real" (fol. 154). Once again, fantasy, imagination, seems preferable to reality. At that moment, the little boy, immobile and silent until then, suddenly explodes with laughter:

"English ladies!" cried the little boy, dancing out on to [sic] the balcony. "English ladies!" He strutted and posed, as if in imitation of them, bursting into gurgles of delighted laughter.

Eleanor began to laugh too, but Dorothy was indignant.

"I think *he's* a horrid cheeky little boy," she said.

(fol. 155)

Eleanor is more tolerant—cheeky he may be, "But human and real . . . and that's what children are like, after all. How very tiring it would be to have one in the house—it would upset one's whole life" (fol. 155). She feels "a warm satisfaction" at the thought of their comfortable orderly home to which they will soon return. Dorothy agrees emphatically that children around the house would be impossibly upsetting. It would be fantastic, almost like, "she searched about for a suitably fantastic comparison, 'like me becoming a Roman Catholic, or something extraordinary like that!'" (fol. 155). In a somewhat awkward last paragraph, we learn that Dorothy, seemingly aggressive in her hostility toward Catholicism, has been very much attracted to "the dangerous things she had seen here and how she had almost begun to toy with the idea of finding out something more about it" (fol. 155). But she does not tell Eleanor, who would never understand.

In creating Eleanor, Barbara Pym goes somewhat further than she had with Laura, Juliana, Edith, and the other central figures. Children do not generally play a great part in Pym; here the Spanish boy becomes highly suggestive. The story begins with an image of the English ladies, a little dazed after a long train journey, looking at the sea amidst exotic Spanish flora. They are surrounded by children: "solemn dark-eyed children, more elaborately dressed than they would have been in England, the little girls wearing gold earrings" (fol. 146). The little boy is first noticed after waking from sleep. Eleanor is highly conscious of

her own deficiency, of the mild amusement that she and “the English” occasion among the Spanish. She is self-conscious and awkward at this sudden, unexpected scrutiny; she wonders “whether she should smile or wave” (fol. 150). “Like many unmarried women her manner with children was awkward; she was a little afraid of them, not knowing what it was that their serious disconcerting eyes saw” (fol. 150). Silent, unsmiling, unmoving, the boy is at first alarming; he suggests the other, the alien, observing, judging. Dorothy’s reaction, when told of the boy, is that “we ought to keep the shutters closed” (fol. 151).

But his meaning changes. From the observant, judging, alien-other, he becomes a symbol to Eleanor of what she lacks and will never possess, even to the point of her discussing the possibility of adopting a child. Her identity as English gentlewoman, civil servant, spinster, is shaken; the boy forces her to explore a part of herself kept away from her emotional center and she is strongly attracted. Eleanor confronts a reality of her own life: its limits, its slightly ridiculous quality, its literal sterility. She turns away, as the Pymian heroine so often does, to the familiar, the orderly, the predictable—to the small comforts.

Barbara Pym proceeds here through oppositions: between England, safe and orderly, and “the dangerous places”; between the English, dim, pale, lacking beauty and intensity and the “dark people”; between familiar, low-intensity Anglicanism and exotic, dramatic Spanish Roman Catholicism. Both women are stirred, strongly attracted to the foreign, the exotic. But like Juliana, they turn away: they choose the familiar, the safe, the thinly sustaining. They choose a life “not full,” but offering its small, predictable satisfactions.

And so the English ladies have been attracted and stirred by possibilities present in one of the dangerous places. The boy and the church suggest the void in their orderly lives, and their ambiguous feelings about themselves. They choose the ordinary and familiar, of course, represented by their life together, but Barbara Pym allows us to see the incomplete quality of their emotional lives. She is once again representing the situation of “not having”—the feelings of emptiness, the realization of failure and limit, that so many of Barbara Pym’s women embody.

“Across a Crowded Room” is one of Barbara Pym’s most finished and mature short stories. It offers a subtle and delicate treatment of the themes of past and present, of opportunity lost, of “not having.” It offers as well a concern equally significant in Pym: the protagonist’s sense of time passing, of age and transience. The story is based on Barbara Pym’s own visit to a commemorative dinner at Oxford in 1978

and thus, like most of her work, published and unpublished, it is biographically suggestive.<sup>15</sup> The central figure, the Pym surrogate, as it were, is a middle-aged single woman, one of the few women asked to this elegant occasion. She has been invited by a friend of her own years, a professor of history at the college. Her table partner is none other than the rather sinister Ned, familiar to those who have read *The Sweet Dove Died*. Ned is an American professor of English literature at a "small respectable New England college," visiting Oxford in pursuit of some academic literary project. His presentation here is quite similar to that in the novel: a homosexual, egotistical, with gnatlike voice and rather arch enthusiasm. Young-looking, but at second glance not so young as all that, he refers, in speaking to the woman, to his trip to Keats's house: "'1968 or '69 it must have been—a wet day and certain tensions in the air.' He smiled."<sup>16</sup> Readers of *The Sweet Dove Died* will remember the occasion well; one of the pleasures of Pym is the interrelatedness of some of her characters, the seamless quality of her world.

"All passion spent." The woman thinks as she glances around the elegant, candlelit hall, that it was kind of "dear old George" to invite her, to give her a night out in contrast to her dull life in the country. She had thought of a new dress, given the occasion, but senses that something dark and unobtrusive would be the most appropriate for a woman of her age in such a setting. She is herself a graduate of Oxford; she had read English, and she entertains the thought that she could have become a person of distinction, had her life taken a different direction. But now she is content to savor the excellent food and make unremarkable conversation with her neighbors at table.

She notices at the high table a familiar-looking man who reminds her of someone she knew long ago, but whose name she cannot recall. Later she does remember; they had read English together as undergraduates. "Gervase Harding, the name came back to her. It had seemed a romantic name in those days . . ." (p. 36). Increasingly, as the evening proceeds she considers him. They have not met for over thirty years and she has not followed his career as an academic. Yet he is associated for her with youth and romance; the lyrics of "Some Enchanted Evening" occur to her, something about seeing a stranger across a crowded room. But the associations of romance interweave with those of age and transience.

"What are you smiling at?" Ned's gnatlike voice broke in.

"Only that I've seen somebody I used to know a long time ago, and his hair, which used to be fair, is now quite gray or white—hard to tell exactly at this distance."

"His golden locks Time hath to silver turn'd." Ned quoted mockingly. "Do you know that poem?"

"Peele, isn't it, or one of those minor Elizabethans." She did remember. (p. 36)

Like Anglicanism, the work of the English poets forms an important basis for Barbara Pym's fiction. Often a certain work or works form a key motif in the novels, such as Gray's "Elegy" in *Some Tame Gazelle*. Here the suggestion of male beauty and heroism defaced by time carries with it the mock-heroic overtones so typically at play in Barbara Pym while still retaining point. The woman's sense of transience, of the passing of youth, of past and present and opportunity lost, of the permanence of memory are suggested by the lines. "Across a Crowded Room" is a story written relatively late in the author's career, but the theme is found at the heart of her first successful work of fiction, *Some Tame Gazelle*, written shortly after she had left Oxford.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed the story opens with subtle reminders of transience contrasted against a sense of the permanence and centrality of the past. The darkened college hall with its portraits of "past Rectors and benefactors," the Latin grace ("how much had she remembered of her Latin?"), indeed the occasion itself, a commemorative dinner, point back into the past, while the "fresh young voices of the singers in the gallery, contrasted with the scene below" (p. 34). The conversation from moment to moment traces out the theme: "'We did have some wet summers in the late sixties,' she ventured. 'When I went there, [Keats's house] it was spring and the blossom was out.' In April, the cruellest month, immortalized by a great American poet . . ." (p. 35). The contrast between past and present, youth and age, romantic expectation and middle-age resignation is continued: as the guests stroll in the college grounds between courses, the new college quadrangle is pointed out to her. The modern design seems banal and out of place: "They [the new buildings] remind her of something a child might construct from his box of bricks" (p. 36). She half hopes that at the next course she might be seated next to Gervase, but instead her partner is that very embodiment of the new age, a computer specialist. On her other side, however, is the Rector, who is associated with the past by virtue of his position and his manner. He invites her to partake of a liqueur in "an elegant eighteenth-century decanter." When she mentions that she lives near the Wychwood forest the Rector himself seems moved by private recollection: "he smiled a kind of secret smile. 'You know it?' she asked. 'I did know it, once, many years ago.' It seemed to be that kind of

evening, with its reminiscences of old unhappy far-off things and battles long ago" (p. 37).

Her thoughts turn again to Gervase. He had married soon after going down from the university. What was his wife's name? Something starting with M? "Memory plays such curious tricks"—the Rector's voice interrupts her recollections, and she agrees. She by chance catches Gervase's eye and knows that they will meet before the end of the evening. "How would he greet her? With silence and tears? Well, hardly that—there had been nothing romantically Byronic about their last meeting. Things had just fizzled out, so either he would remember her or he would not. She must be prepared for a blank look of nonrecognition—men were expert at that" (p. 38). The hint of hostility in this last sentence is telling; when at last they do meet after dinner in the common room, he does not appear to remember her and she reacts with latent resentment. She realizes that "*She* would have to fill in the details, explain that they had met all those years ago when they had both read English at Oxford" (p. 38). She is about to do this "with mechanical politeness, in the way that nice women so often find themselves doing," when she rebels. She herself does not understand why she remains silent, merely smiling, refusing to provide the pleasant formalities that are obviously expected.

As they walk in the grounds, she relents somewhat, reminding him that they used to attend Professor Ransome's lectures on the Elizabethans. She is startled at his sudden quotation from Peele: "'His golden locks Time hath to silver turn'd.'" He seems almost to be applying it to her. When she asks his wife's name—"Something beginning with 'M,' wasn't it?"—she is amazed to learn that he never married.

She looked at him in amazement. It *was* Gervase; there had been no case of mistaken identity, but in some way her memory had been at fault. He had never married! An abyss seemed to open before her, and their conversation came to a full stop. Standing by an ornamental pool, they suddenly had nothing more to say to each other. (pp. 38–39).

A group of strollers appears, Ned among them. She hears his "unmistakable tones" drawing attention to a dead pigeon lying in the water around a curious statue in the modern manner, suggestive of a torso. Here is the climax of the story; the complex of romantic associations surrounding Gervase is impossible. Later, as they say their goodbyes, she notes that "'we've had to revise our memories a little'" (p. 39). She speculates briefly on his current situation—has he a

mistress? But "it was too late and she was too tired to speculate further" (p. 39).

In the short paragraph that ends the story, George tells his wife that his guest seemed to enjoy the evening: "she had even met an old flame or something—he wasn't quite sure what" (p. 39). His lack of certainty mirrors that of the woman; what is Gervase to her? As in "Goodbye, Balkan Capital!" an opportunity had been missed; memory has been founded upon a radical mistake. But while Laura Arling determinedly retains her sense of the past, here it seems hardly to matter. This story was written late in Barbara Pym's career; her protagonist is in her sixties. The story's emphasis is on her sense of resignation, of age, and of time passing inexorably.

The theme of the permanence and significance of memory is varied in "The White Elephant." Again the central figure is elderly, here a decayed gentlewoman, Miss Edith Bankes-Tolliver, who lives alone in a bed-sitting room in once fashionable, now shabby Montgomery Square.<sup>18</sup> Visited by a young curate, she retains upper-class hauteur as she expresses horror that "'the district has gone down so'" (MS. Pym 94, fol. 293). She speaks of those past days when her family cut a figure with servants and parties and when St. Mildred's was a fashionable church with three curates. Absorbed in the past, she speaks of one of these young curates, Mr. Gorringe, who had a fine voice. "'*Oft in the still night . . .* how we loved to hear him sing that . . .' her voice was low now, almost murmuring" (fol. 294). Her small room is cluttered with "her treasures," all relics of girlhood. The grand piano is covered with silver-framed photographs "of heavy-moustached men in military uniform, full-bosomed Edwardian ladies and prim groups of young girls in flat straw hats" (fol. 294). Dignified to the point of absurdity, disdainful of the present, Miss *Bankes-Tolliver* (she insists on the presence of the *Bankes*), is almost a comic figure. Yet she has a strength and dignity that separates her from the distressed gentlewomen portrayed elsewhere by Barbara Pym—who are so often dependent, too eager to please. She is associated with a past which, although slightly ridiculous with its suggestions of Edwardian stuffiness and pomp, is nonetheless solid and substantial in contrast with a shabby present which really has "gone down so."

When the curate invites her to a jumble sale "In aid of the Sunday School outing" Miss *Bankes-Tolliver* is only politely interested; *jumble sales* are obviously not her milieu. But when he mentions that Lady Hogarth has sent a "lot of stuff" Edith is alert: Alice Hogarth was a girlhood friend, and, we learn, a rival. The jumble sale, with its cast-off

items, offers an entry into the past. And indeed, Edith does attend the sale out of curiosity; what are the "good things" Alice Hogarth has sent? As she walks to the Church Hall she thinks about her girlhood, when she and Alice had taught in the Sunday School. Alice had been pretty, different from Edith "with her long face and awkward movements" (fol. 297).

No wonder Mr. Gorringe had lost interest in Edith when Alice came to teach in the Sunday School. Oh, yes, he had fallen in love with her—one could admit it after all these years—and many people said that Alice had loved him too, even though she had married somebody else. Mr. Gorringe wouldn't have been considered a *good* marriage, although he had been so handsome . . . (fol. 297)

At the sale, Edith makes a show of indifference about seeing Alice Hogarth's things, but moves directly to what is left—old books, china, and photograph frames. She finds two teenage girls giggling over a photograph in a tarnished silver frame. When they learn it is priced at fourpence, they laughingly reject it. Edith picks it up and "stared in shocked amazement at the solemn-looking young clergyman in his high collar. . . . Arthur Gorringe, after all these years! She felt she would have liked to sit down, but there were no chairs . . ." (fol. 299). She feels the same sense of shock as did Laura Arling upon learning of Crispin's real history, or the unnamed protagonist of "Across a Crowded Room" upon learning that Gervase Harding had never married. Lady Hogarth has sent Arthur Gorringe to a jumble sale! Once again Barbara Pym dramatizes that crucial moment when memory must be revised, personal history rewritten. Stiffly and with a great show of dignity, Edith buys the photograph and, returning home, lights the gas fire and makes herself a cup of tea before examining the photograph. Now she sees Arthur not as she has in memory for all these many years, but from a radically different perspective. How sickly the expression of piety—she almost prefers the jolly, rumpled young curate who visited her. The hostility that one sensed in the woman of "Across a Crowded Room," a hostility which manifests itself only latently, is here made overt; Edith feels a sense of triumph and revenge:

Perhaps it served Mr. Gorringe right, that his photograph should have been sent to a Jumble Sale and sold for fourpence on the White Elephant stall. The White Elephant stall . . . Miss Bankes Toliver suddenly smiled to herself as she looked again at the pale, ponderous face, the small eyes, the rather large ears. Had Arthur Gorringe really looked like that? White Elephant . . . (fols. 299–300)

She realizes that Gorringe is *funny*, that she does not care any more about his perfidy, about Alice Hogarth's unfair advantage of having both good looks and good works: "For that was surely one of the sad but comforting things about life, that after a time one *didn't care* any more" (fol. 300). While Laura Arling remains fixated and dependent upon memory, Edith is freed from her latent feelings of resentment. She hardly knows what to do with the photograph—it certainly does not belong among the photographs on the piano: "After all, it was forty years too late" (fol. 300). But she will find a use for the frame—it will polish up nicely.

I have described a pattern in Barbara Pym's short fiction which seems fundamental to her work as a whole. It is clear that she turns repeatedly to explorations of the centrality of memory and fantasy, and dramatizes the opposition of past and present, youth and age, opportunity and loss, the romantic and the familiar. Her most interesting characters, all women,<sup>19</sup> typically treasure-up memory or elaborate present experience into fantasy. At the moment when reality intrudes, there is crisis and then a variety of response: either flight, or determined restoration of memory, or resignation, or release.<sup>20</sup> A feature of many such characters is their feeling of being *negligible*. This is an important emotion in Barbara Pym; it is part of her interest in failure, in "not having." The "unwanted" women who must content themselves with the "Common Task, the Trivial Round," these are important characters in Pym's fiction—although by no means does she create this type exclusively.

One of the most interesting of such characters is Jessie Morrow. Barbara Pym was apparently fascinated with this character and re-created Jessie at length in the novels *Crampton Hodnet* and *Jane and Prudence* as well as two short stories. She is in all these works the seemingly diffident, unobtrusive paid companion to the dowager Miss Doggett. In *Crampton Hodnet*, Jessie is described as "a thin, used-up-looking woman in her middle thirties," but "Miss Morrow, in spite of her misleading appearance, was a woman of definite personality, who was able to look upon herself and her surroundings with detachment."<sup>21</sup> She does not "pretend to be anything more than a woman past her first youth, resigned to the fact that her life was probably never going to be more exciting than it was now" (p. 3). Here Jessie, "although unworldly, [has] a natural delicacy . . ." (p. 46). Her desire to escape from stifling North Oxford is fulfilled through listening to romantic music from the Continent. In the later *Jane and Prudence* Jessie Morrow is a much stronger figure. Pym emphasizes Jessie's semi-disguised,

mocking wit and her determined and successful drive to escape her intolerable situation as "companion."

Jessie seems the kind of person nobody notices: a dim little woman with no life of her own. However, we find in all the works in which she appears that her modest appearance and demeanor are quite misleading. She is in reality intelligent and calculating, full of sly malice, contemptuous of her employer and most of those around her. Those who know her persistently underestimate her, and at the end of *Jane and Prudence* she triumphs through her shrewd insight into Fabian Driver and her determination to marry him and thus live in affluent comfort. She is, then, unlike that other companion, Edith Gossett of "Something to Remember," who is seen as helpful, courteous, and modest, although it is evident that even "Gossy" feels latent resentment of Simon. Jessie's dim appearance hides a formidable personality.

The Jessie Morrow story, in all the versions in which she appears, is one of oblique rebellion, of muted self-assertion, which in itself constitutes a protest against the assumption by others that she is negligible. Jessie is typically invisible to others; in one short story, "The vicar's wife had her back turned as Miss Morrow entered and nobody noticed her come in" (MS. Pym 94, fol. 181). Her protest takes the form of a covert mockery and a continual observation of the scene with an eye for the absurdities of others and, indeed, her own best interests.

Jessie appears in two short stories, variations of each other. The less satisfying is called "So Some Tempestuous Morn. . ."<sup>22</sup> This version suffers from a split focus: our interest is divided between Jessie and Miss Gossett's teenage niece, Anthea. The more interesting is "So, Some Tempestuous Morn" (MS. Pym 94, fols. 175-87). Miss Doggett lives in North Oxford, a district Barbara Pym seems to have associated with stifling academic gentility and gloom. Miss Morrow wakes to hear the rain and smiles, "almost glad" that the rain will have spoiled the flowers she was to pick for decorating the church that morning. Here is the suggestion of rebellion, indeed subversion, that Jessie embodies. As she lies in bed she thinks of a favorite verse from Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis": "So, some tempestuous morn in early June, / When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er. . ." The poem represents an awareness of middle age and thus suggests Jessie's own feelings of age passing without compensation. Those who remember the Jessie Morrow of *Jane and Prudence* may be surprised at Jessie's fondness for Matthew Arnold or any other poet. In that novel there is little suggestion that Jessie inclines to the gratifications of English literature. In this story, Jessie is in her late thirties, an age that "could be many things for a woman and

not all of them quite the prime" (fol. 178). Jessie feels keenly the contrast between her oppressive life in the gloom of Miss Doggett's damp, sullen house, her employer's stolid conventionality ("how unsuitable" seems to be her refrain), and her own sense of Spring and her life passing too quickly.

As Jessie rises, she looks through her window to the theological college across the way. In her "vivid imagination" she pictures the students "in their narrow cell-like rooms, all behaving in a devout and suitable manner" (fol. 178). Or it is to be hoped they are behaving in such a manner, she says to herself, always the amused and cynical observer. Perhaps she sees a humorous parallel between the lives of the students, each in his cell-like room, behaving in a suitable manner, and her own situation. She sees a "strikingly handsome clergyman" of about her own years entering the school grounds. As he does so, "something must have made him turn and glance at the house opposite and upwards at the figure of Miss Morrow standing in the window" (fol. 178). A sudden impulse makes him wave at Miss Morrow. She laughs to herself; whatever could he have been thinking of? No doubt it was merely a gesture to a figure he assumed was "one of the servants' paying a tribute to his good looks" (fol. 179). In *Jane and Prudence* we see a similar action: Jessie suddenly and unexpectedly waves to Fabian Driver, who has been observing her from his window. He is astonished and puzzled by this gesture. To the reader Jessie's strange action seems clear. It is itself a gesture of oblique derision, but it marks Jessie's determination to hunt down and capture Fabian, primarily through sexual means, thus escaping her unpleasant life with Miss Doggett.

In the short story, the scene is equally revealing: Jessie's keen imagination, her sense of absurdity, her resentment of easy male superiority, of being classified at once as a servant—all this is suggested. But most evident is the suggestion of Jessie's sexual response. We witness her rise from bed and "with a daring gesture, [fling] aside the net curtain that screened her doings from prying eyes" (fol. 178). A monkey puzzle further screens the room from life outside. She gazes toward the theological college, and we are told that "Miss Morrow's vivid imagination went rushing boldly in . . ." That Jessie's response to the clergyman is predominately sexual is made clear by the next episode. As Jessie hurries into the dining room, Miss Doggett notes that the flowers have been beaten down by the rain. "'Yes, ravaged, aren't they,' Miss Morrow glanced indifferently towards the window, 'ravaged, ravished, one might almost say.' 'Ravished?' repeated Miss Doggett, her voice puzzled. 'Ravished, yes,' repeated Miss Morrow firmly" (fol. 179).

Miss Doggett is puzzled and irritated by her companion. So often Jessie's attitude is confusing, unsuitable. She often has "these little lapses." "It wasn't that she was unsatisfactory, there was nothing one could put one's finger on, exactly—it was these remarks she let fall, these unsuitabilities, were they perhaps clues to what went on in her mind, her thoughts?" (fol. 180). They are indeed; we understand the element of rebellion and of sexuality behind Jessie's necessary deference. The image of Jessie at the window repeats that of Eleanor of "English Ladies" looking out of her room at the Other.

Sent to help decorate the church for the Whitsuntide services and to buy cakes for the next day's tea, Jessie on impulse plays hooky. She leaves the church, where the usual assortment of church workers is playing out a scene so typical in Pym, the decoration of the church for some festival or other, with its opportunities for comic "unpleasantnesses." Stimulated by the fresh spring day, and her constant impulse to rebellion, Jessie goes instead to morning coffee, a refreshment especially disapproved of by Miss Doggett. "She found a table on the outside edge of the room where she could observe and remain inconspicuous, a dim figure on the fringe of the University . . ." (fol. 182). Her keen observation and comic sense come into play—she notices that several clergy have, like herself, succumbed to the decadence of morning coffee and cakes.

Describing tea the next day, Barbara Pym exercises her best comic talent: Miss Doggett, notorious for her excruciatingly dull teas, presides over an odd lot of dull undergraduates, whose parents, indeed, grandparents and grandaunts and granduncles, have some sort of acquaintance with Miss Doggett. The scene parallels the equally amusing account of Miss Doggett's Sunday teas in *Crampton Hodnet*. But here one of the guests turns out to be Mr. Darrell, the handsome clergyman who waved to Jessie. He wonders at one point if he has not seen Miss Morrow before. "'Seen Miss Morrow?' Miss Doggett's tone was incredulous. 'I hardly think that's likely'" (fol. 186). And "'After all, a great many people look like Miss Morrow.'" Miss Morrow once again is made to feel negligible. But realizing that Mr. Darrell does not at all remember her, she suddenly feels exhilarated: "He doesn't remember, she thought, experiencing that sense of power that women do sometimes feel over men" (fol. 186). As Miss Doggett leads the company into the garden, Miss Morrow in a gesture of defiance, "picked up a large fancy cake and devoured it in two bites. Then, with almost a swaggering air, she too went out through the french windows and followed the party round the garden" (fol. 187). Jessie has

triumphed over Miss Doggett; in every version in which she appears she engages in covert protest against Miss Doggett's overwhelming refusal to acknowledge Jessie's right to a modicum of dignity. And Jessie triumphs also in a more oblique fashion: like Juliana, like Edith Gossett, she turns away from sexual possibility. The clergyman does not recognize her; she is free to withdraw, to reenter her room, to live behind the closed curtains that hide her doings from prying eyes. Jessie lives best through her vivid imagination, through her keen observation and cynical wit.

In the other version of this story, the conception of Jessie is altered. Indeed, Barbara Pym modified this character through each of the four versions in which Jessie appears so that "Jessie Morrow" seems a vehicle for Barbara Pym's continual experimentation with a certain kind of character. In "So Some Tempestuous Morn . . ." Jessie buys a gay, spring-like, new dress during her truancy from church decorating, and at Miss Doggett's tea actually engages in flirtation with the handsome clergyman who responds with much gaiety. (Indeed, here he is called Mr. Merriman.) It is she who waves at the handsome clergyman from her window. The final paragraph again has Jessie signalizing her triumph over Miss Doggett by devouring a cake "in two bites." But the suggestion of Jessie's preference for withdrawal and fantasy is replaced here by a quite different conception of her character.

In both versions, however, Barbara Pym suggests, to use a phrase that occurs to Miss Doggett, "the darkness of [Jessie's] mind." Her sense of time passing, of the onset of middle age, her resentment, her determination to assert herself, albeit indirectly, her half-hidden aggression, her latent sexuality—all of these we understand. The stories dramatize, then, those little, nameless, half-remembered acts of covert defiance and mockery, the hoarding-up of secret knowledge, the small moments of rebellion, in which Jessie is able to assert herself and thus win her small victories. She protests, by sly malice, the denial of herself by others, which includes denial of her sexuality, her feelings of spring. The story becomes comic and is made more interesting because her protest must take the form of ludicrous gestures of defiance.

These are few characters in Barbara Pym with such a clear division between outward appearance and inner resentment and anger. In the early novel *Crampton Hodnet* Jessie is a weaker character; at the conclusion she realizes that she will not escape the oppressive gloom of North Oxford. In *Jane and Prudence* we find her far stronger and purposeful, determined and successful in her desire to escape. But all versions suggest a continual preoccupation of Barbara Pym: the

situation of a passive or dependent woman who feels confined by personality, circumstance, and patterns of genteel behavior and is resentful of the denial by others of her sexuality—indeed, of her existence. It is the story of Edith Gossett and Laura Arling.

This figure, the “companion,” fascinated Barbara Pym, who created several such characters. One short story which centers on this companion figure is of particular note because it reverses the pattern I have been discussing. In “Back to St. Petersburg,” Laura Kennicote is “a sensible woman of thirty two, fresh-faced and strong, the ideal companion for an old lady” (MS. Pym 92, fol. 52). Despite her relative youth, she feels herself to be middle-aged: “She had put all thoughts of youth out of her head when she had found herself forced to earn her living as a companion” (fol. 52). Far from feeling unfulfilled, she is quite satisfied with her life: “I regard myself as a capable, middle-aged spinster. It’s a very comfortable state to be in” (fol. 53). She seems to be a variation of Edith Gossett, but here Laura travels to Germany, has an affair with a German aristocrat, claims when meeting some English acquaintances that she has married him, and then, when the affair has run its course, returns to England, satisfied and content to reassume her position with her sympathetic employer, Miss Elm. Barbara Pym offers a number of stories in which intelligent, strong, self-aware women act resolutely to achieve their interests. It is not accurate, then, to say that she writes exclusively of women who are in some way or other unsatisfied or failures.

I have been concerned to indicate that much of Barbara Pym’s best short fiction, as yet unpublished, embodies her most central concerns. She wrote other stories of course. She is at her comic best in three works. The radio play, “Parrots’ Eggs: An Anthropological Comedy” (MS. Pym 96, fols. 129-52), reintroduces us to the familiar Pymian world of the anthropologists, with their hypersensitive egos, rivalries, and jargon, and their essential triviality. A meeting at the “Society for Research among Primitive Tribes” is very much like that attended by Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women*. “‘Is there no ceremonial devouring of human flesh?’” asks an “Old Man.” “‘I had hoped to hear something of it among the Lyambooloo’” (fol. 131). The action here is playful and fantastic; “Parrots’ Eggs” portrays attempted murder resolving itself into love and marriage.<sup>23</sup> “The Rectory (Or any other title you like!)” is similarly playful (MS. Pym 96, fols. 153-66). It too opens onto a world often explored by Barbara Pym: the “churchy” world of the country parish. A radio play, it contrasts the Rector,

old-fashioned, vague, detached, and amused, against the hearty, "with-it" endlessly busy rival churchman, Father Bompas. Like Archdeacon Hoccleve of *Some Tame Gazelle*, the Rector is married to a sharp, nagging wife, who would like to see some worldly ambition and success in her somewhat lazy husband. Our guide to this ecclesiastical rivalry is a character called simply "The Excellent Woman." Another comic piece, "The Christmas Visit" (MS. Pym 92, fols. 71-77), portrays Mark and Sophia Ainger, familiar from *An Unsuitable Attachment*. Here, their well-meaning invitation to three persons they consider in need of Christmas solace proves uncomfortable, if not disastrous, for all involved. Other works of short fiction by Barbara Pym are not so successful. There are too many stories that seem intended for "the woman's page," for the soap-opera audience. In a letter to the literary agency Curtis Brown Ltd., November 8, 1953, Barbara Pym suggested that "My stories aren't good enough for a highbrow magazine, even if such things existed which they hardly do, and were in fact written with women's magazines in mind" (MS. Pym 147). In these Barbara Pym loses her distinctive voice as she moves away from her characteristic concerns.

In her essay, "'Only a Novel'—Some Personal Reflections" (MS. Pym 162/3, fols. 70-72), Barbara Pym makes an amusing though serious defense of the novel. She suggests that the writer needs qualities she herself has observed in superior anthropological fieldwork: "accurate observation, detachment, even sympathy," plus those qualities seen in good fiction: "imagination, plus the leavening of irony and humour" (fol. 71). These comments obviously apply to the writing of short fiction and Pym herself in several if not all of her short works manifests such qualities. In a radio talk, "Finding a Voice" (MS. Pym 96, fols. 4-15), she politely deflected the well-intentioned comparison of her own works to those of Jane Austen, noting that no contemporary novelist would dare claim that she was so influenced although "Certainly all who read and love Jane Austen may *try* to write with the same economy of language, even *try* to look at their characters with her kind of detachment...."<sup>24</sup> Though her accomplishment is uneven, the stories are important, for they offer characters, situations, and themes which are found in the novels and so help us to an expanded sense of this writer.

They also offer material of biographical importance. In "Finding a Voice," Barbara Pym noted that "memory is a great transformer of pain into amusement" (fol. 5). The validity of this is documented in her own life and writings. Almost all of Barbara Pym's fiction, both published and unpublished, has biographical import. In a talk given in Barnes in

the 1950s ("The Novelist's Use of Every-Day Life," MS. Pym 98, fols. 56-73) she wrote:

I think authors very seldom take a character straight from life, they are nearly always composite figures and the greatest source of material for character drawing is probably the author's own self. Even when a novel isn't obviously autobiographical one can learn a good deal about a novelist from his works, for he can hardly avoid putting something of himself into his creations. (fol. 66)

Barbara Pym's notebooks many times reveal her projecting a possible fictional character in the first person: "Am I a widow? I am 60 or thereabouts . . ." (MS. Pym 52, XIII, fol. 5 verso). Perhaps the most direct and revealing autobiographical story is "Mothers and Fathers" (MS. Pym 94, fols. 1-15), where "Miss Barbara Pym" appears. The story is a private comic fantasy, perhaps too personal to be successful. Here she presents herself as middle-aged, withdrawn, resigned: "Miss Pym was forty three years old, with a vague face whose expression might once have been kind. Now she looked somehow withdrawn as if she had already lived her life and were merely marking time for the years that remained to her" (fol. 1).

Barbara Pym's own desire was to achieve a distinct and recognizable voice. She wished to create a fictional world expressed in a style that was her own: "I think that's the kind of immortality most authors would want—to feel that their work would be immediately recognisable as having been written by them and by nobody else. But of course, it's a lot to ask for!" (MS. Pym 96, fol. 15). She appears to have achieved just that in her published work. The unpublished short fiction, varied though its accomplishments may be, succeeds best when expressing the subjects that most fascinated Barbara Pym and which she re-created from first to last in her career as a novelist.

<sup>1</sup> "Barbara Pym: Out of the Wilderness," produced by Greybirch Productions, 1984. Barbara Pym's remarks were taped by the BBC in 1978 and incorporated into the film produced later by Greybirch.

<sup>2</sup> Only one of her short stories was published during her lifetime in an important, widely distributed magazine. "Across a Crowded Room" was written for the *New Yorker* and appeared in the issue of July 16, 1979, pp. 34-39.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, her entry for February 20, 1941: "This evening I was looking for a notebook in which to keep a record of *dreams* and I found this diary, this sentimental journal or whatever you (Gentle Reader in the Bodleian) like to call it." See *A Very Private Eye*, eds. Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym (New York: Dutton, 1984), p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> The several unpublished novels I find unsatisfactory; none, taken as a whole, quite approaches her published work. *Civil to Strangers*, *Young Men in Fancy Dress*, and the other unpublished novels offer only occasionally the typical satisfactions of Barbara Pym: a recognizable and familiar fictional world in which a rich wit, expressed through a distinctive voice, becomes the vehicle for a pointed and important statement. The recently published *Crampton Hodnet* may stand as an instance of my contention, although the published version appears as amended (and improved) by Barbara Pym's literary executor.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Pym, *Quartet in Autumn* (1977; rpt. New York: Perennial Library, 1980), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> MS. Pym 92, fol. 117. My references are to the Barbara Pym manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I use foliation numbers rather than the original page numbering by Barbara Pym. I have silently corrected obvious, insignificant typographical errors. Further references will be found in the text.

<sup>7</sup> The letter from Anita Christopherson, Fiction Editor of *Woman and Beauty*, is dated 14 March 1950 (MS Pym 163/1, fol. 10). Barbara Pym's letter to her is dated 15 March 1950 (MS Pym 163/1, fol. 11).

<sup>8</sup> Holt and Pym, eds., *A Very Private Eye*, p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to compare the fictionalized account with Pym's actual diary entries for the period. See, for example, Holt and Pym, eds., *A Very Private Eye*, p. 105. A later entry, for Sunday, 14 March 1943, tells of the peaceful and timeless quality of these all-night vigils: "Firewatching was quite peaceful. There is a curious timelessness about it, as if one were *really* in one's marble vault...." See Holt and Pym, eds., *A Very Private Eye*, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> The play was broadcast February 1, 1950.

<sup>11</sup> MS. Pym 96, fol. 218. The curious possibility of sending an unwanted person to a rummage sale reappears in the short story "The White Elephant" and in the novel *Excellent Women*; see the beginning of Chapter Five.

<sup>12</sup> This story has close similarities to *Crampton Hodnet*. Always economical, Barbara Pym dramatizes in the novel the well-connected careerist Simon Beddoes, who carries on a year's romance with Anthea Cleveland, although destined of course for foreign service and "a good marriage." In "Something to Remember," Simon's "You're such a nice, sensible person, and not too young," recalls Stephen Latimer's labeling of Jessie Morrow as a "nice, sensible woman, not too young." Like Jessie Morrow, Miss Gossett quotes from "Thyrsis" lines which suggest her awareness of the passing of youth. Reading Barbara Pym's fiction, published and unpublished, one sees the continual working and reworking of her preoccupations.

<sup>13</sup> There are two quite different stories with similar titles. I discuss above "English Ladies," MS. Pym 92, fols. 145-55. "The English Ladies" (MS. Pym 92, fols. 129-44) resembles the story I discuss only in the fine comic rendition of the middle-class English abroad. This second version presents an attractive young Englishwoman who travels with a group to Spain, encounters a romantic young Englishman, but withdraws from his advances, believing that nothing could really come of an affair except her ultimate rejection by him. She prefers memory: "All the interesting and amusing things they had done were going to be lovely to remember" (fol. 142). Thus she resembles Juliana of "The Day the Music Came." Barbara Pym often creates characters that seem to embody

aspects of her own emotional life; here she gives her family name of Crampton to her heroine, Elizabeth.

<sup>14</sup> This story once again shows Barbara Pym at her comic best as she describes one of her favorite scenes: the strange rituals of English middle-class tourism. Indeed, the dismal "tourist hotel" seemed to fascinate her and draw her forth; her readers will remember the ghastly "Eagle House Private Hotel" of *No Fond Return of Love*. As in the case of "English Ladies" and "So Some Tempestuous Morn," there are two versions of "A Few Days before the Winter."

<sup>15</sup> See her letter to Philip Larkin, 6 April 1978, in Holt and Pym, eds., *A Very Private Eye*, p. 317.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Pym, "Across a Crowded Room," pp. 34-35.

<sup>17</sup> The first draft of *Some Tame Gazelle* was begun in 1935; Pym made important, indeed crucial, changes in the novel after World War II.

<sup>18</sup> In *Excellent Women*, Edith Banks-Tolliver, 118 Montgomery Square, is one of Mildred Lathbury's clients at the Society to Aid Distressed Gentlewomen.

<sup>19</sup> In all of her work, short stories and novels, published and unpublished, I count only one work, the short story "Unpast Alps" (MS. Pym 94, fols. 260-69), which has for its central character, a male. Here a ludicrous failure of a would-be poet is persuaded to leave his unprofitable work on an epic poem for the comforts of affluent domesticity. There are, of course, many of Pym's fictions which offer strong male characterizations.

<sup>20</sup> One story reverses this pattern with startling effect. In "A Painted Heart" (MS. Pym 94, fols. 16-30) a young, attractive but arrogant Englishwoman travels to Hungary, where she engages in a flirtation with the Hungarian tour guide. At the end of the story, we learn that he is a murderer and that Jennifer has barely escaped becoming another of his victims. It is an inversion of those stories in which the central figure flees direct experience, preferring to live through memory or fantasy. When Jennifer confronts the alien-other, the exotic Hungarian in this case, there is near disaster.

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Pym, *Crampton Hodnet* (New York: Dutton, 1985), p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> MS. Pym 94, fols. 188-204. In her literary notebooks, Barbara Pym called it "A Story about Oxford love and North Oxford" (MS. Pym 40-49, II, fol. 14). It is juxtaposed in this notebook to her notes for *Jane and Prudence*.

<sup>23</sup> We meet an old acquaintance from Barbara Pym's published excursions into the anthropological world: Dr. Apfelbaum is still interested in "the patrilineal clan."

<sup>24</sup> Fol. 8. The talk is dated February 8, 1978.

# The Composition and Publication History of Ezra Pound's *Drafts & Fragments*

R. PETER STOICHEFF

The reader of the last volume of Pound's *Cantos* is unlikely to be aware of the several important "external" conditions imposed upon it which should be taken into account in any critical evaluation. Quite simply, it is a volume whose title was not the author's creation, whose material was not wholly the author's choice, whose arrangement was partially imposed without the author's approval, and whose authorized publication was primarily a response to its premature pirated appearance. Those who fashioned the volume's first authorized edition of 1968 realized that if they did not make quick editorial decisions with as much participation by Pound as possible, his deteriorating health might soon prevent his participation at all, thereby leaving the pirated version to stand as his close to the *Cantos*. And from this perspective the swift choice to produce what was to become the final volume of the *Cantos* was clearly the correct one, for Pound died less than four years afterward, and had written little since 1961.

*Drafts & Fragments* has been published as a single volume by Stone Wall Press, Faber & Faber, and New Directions (1968) and by Faber & Faber itself (1970), and also by New Directions (1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975) and by Faber & Faber (1975) as part of their complete *Cantos* volumes. The Stone Wall/New Directions/Faber & Faber volume of 1968 will be considered the "first authorized edition" here. Its principal publisher, James Laughlin, was corresponding with Pound up to the time of its publication, and is largely responsible for the formal, authorized appearance of the poems at all. Also, the subsequent

editions by New Directions and by Faber & Faber contain a variety of sometimes questionable editorial changes.<sup>1</sup> Cantos 110 to 117 had appeared earlier in a "volume" format in 1967, published by Ed Sanders' "Fuck You Press"—it was this unfortunate occurrence that prompted Laughlin's efforts at sanctioned publication. Sanders' version, discussed more fully later in this essay, I term the "pirated New York 1967 edition."

The exact circumstances surrounding the composition of each canto from 110 on cannot at present be known entirely. However, a fairly accurate idea of when the poems were written can be ascertained by combining biographical data with what the typescripts of the poems reveal about their sequence of composition. Pound never dated his cantos (and, in fact, the inclusion of "Addendum to C" from 1941 suggests that at the end chronological sequence may have mattered little to him), and therefore all attempts to do so now must be based on this precarious mixture of external fact, informed conjecture, and textual evidence. Mary de Rachewiltz, who lived with her father during the first months of the composition of these poems at least, believes that a firm dating process is impossible,<sup>2</sup> and it is useful to keep such caution in mind.

Detailing the publication history of these cantos, as separate compositions and as volumes, both unsanctioned and authorized, is possible, and critically valuable. The critic who chooses to investigate Pound's final volume of the *Cantos* in relation to the "form" of the whole work, or as an example of closure in a theoretical treatise on generic structure, for instance, should understand precisely which aspects of *Drafts & Fragments* can justly support an argument, and which aspects (such as the "humble" canto "CXX" of the 1972 New Directions edition which should not be regarded as Pound's final poem of the work) cannot.<sup>3</sup> Quite possibly, had unusual external circumstances not forced the publication of *Drafts & Fragments*, we would be left to assume, wrongly, that *Thrones de los Cantares* was the end of the *Cantos*, much as Book VI was once considered the end of *The Faerie Queene* or Book IV the end of *Paterson*.

It is incorrect to assume that Pound considered *Drafts & Fragments* to be a finished volume. Both the process of composition and the publication history confirm this. A chronological sequence of composition for the cantos which appear in the volume can be postulated, but fragments of other cantos still in Olga Rudge's possession (including an unpublished canto which Pound in 1966 hoped would be the final canto of the work) prevent a critic from establishing a "complete" copy-text

for a “final volume” at the moment, and probably forever. What we know as *Drafts & Fragments*, therefore, is not Pound’s definitive close; the volume makes visible the problems he encountered with the whole notion of closure and should be viewed as a record of struggle. The following description of the composition and text histories is therefore both tentative and cautionary. To re-create reliably the extent of Pound’s poetic production after *Thrones* up to the completion of the canto CXVII fragments is possible, but hypothetical predictions for the continuation of the volume are necessarily at this point spurious.

In 1958, and again in 1960, Pound remarked to Charlotte Kohler, Donald Hall, and others that he hoped to describe a “paradiso” in the *Cantos* after *Thrones*,<sup>4</sup> and that he viewed the *Cantos* as following a pattern of “ascension.” This does not mean that he foresaw a specific canto number with which to “end” the poem, for, of course, it could have continued describing a paradiso indefinitely. Possibly another benefit of understanding the textual history of *Drafts & Fragments*, then, is to reveal just how indecisive Pound was in this regard, and how difficult he found the problem of the modern long poem’s resolution.

Pound had completed writing *Thrones* while at St. Elizabeth’s, and checked the setting copy and proofs at Brunnenburg in the summer and fall of 1958. Pound therefore knew at that time that canto CIX was to end the *Thrones* volume and that any canto with a higher number written after that would be placed in a subsequent volume. There are two exceptions to this. In a notebook of Pound’s (No. 59, December 28, 1957–May 20, 1958)<sup>5</sup> appears “Canto 110 (or 111 or 112)” written in January of 1958, which resembles parts of the last quarter of canto CIX/773. Another poem was written after December 14, 1957, and probably during the first weeks at Brunnenburg in the summer of 1958, portions of which are used in “Notes for CXI,” “CXIII,” “CXIV,” and “Notes for CXVII et seq.” (fragment #3), as well as canto CIX/774. It seems, then, that “Canto 110 (or 111 or 112)” was written while Pound was unsure exactly with what number *Thrones* would end. The excitement of the sudden promise of freedom in 1957 and early 1958, and the chaotic planning and traveling of the next months could well have inclined him to end the volume with the canto he had positively finished to that point. Thus, “Canto 110 (or 111 or 112),” by its very title an unassimilated composition, was left out, and by the time the Brunnenburg stay had begun, Pound’s circumstances, emotional life, and perception of the *Cantos* had changed to such an extent that much of the objective historical content of that canto, which was consistent with most of *Thrones*, seemed obsolete.

During the first months at Brunnenburg in 1958, then, Pound was aware that the next stage of the *Cantos* would begin with canto CX, since he was correcting proofs for *Thrones*, ending with canto CIX, at that time. Evidently he had difficulty choosing how to open his next volume, how to "write a paradiso when all the superficial indications are that you ought to write an apocalypse,"<sup>6</sup> for there are more early typescript versions of a canto CX than of any other canto in the *Drafts & Fragments* volume.

Other evidence, too, suggests that Pound was having difficulty deciding how to fashion this new canto. In the spring of 1959, probably during his stay at Rapallo, he wrote cantos numbered "CXII," "CXIII," "CXIV," "115," "116," and "117," and sent them back to Brunnenburg for typing. This, which I term the "first collection," notably does not include either a canto CX or a canto CXI, possibly because Pound was unsure of how to establish the ending of the former, and hence the beginning of the latter. The "first collection" reveals that the main portion of the New Directions *Drafts & Fragments* was, in fact, written in the first six or seven months of 1959, and perhaps in June and July exclusively. Since this period witnessed the culmination of personal tensions leading to Pound's departure from his family at Brunnenburg, it is not surprising that its poetry is an introspective and personal one, a startling shift from the perspective of *Rock-Drill* and *Thrones*.

Pound returned to Brunnenburg in October 1959, and probably revised the "first collection" between that date and the spring of 1960. The extent of the revisions can be seen in a first set of cantos (hereafter referred to as DH1) mailed to Donald Hall in March of that year for retyping. This correspondence was related to a *Paris Review* interview Hall had conducted with Pound in Rome earlier that year. Pound had requested that he be paid for the session, and George Plimpton and Hall (editor and poetry editor of the *Paris Review*, respectively), never having paid an interviewee before, decided to purchase some of Pound's material for publication in the same issue in lieu of changing their practice. Considerable discussion ensued between Hall and Pound concerning the choice of material to be included, and one of the reasons Hall received cantos 110 to 116 was to allow him to choose potential sections "which particularly relate to the interview."<sup>7</sup> Of course, by retyping the typescripts of these cantos Hall was assisting Pound as well, for the ensuing cleaner versions, whose bottom copies were returned to Pound, facilitated editing and revising by him.

The differences among the "first collection," "DH1," and the first authorized edition's poems help to illuminate Pound's aesthetic

deliberations. For instance, DH1 does not include a "canto 115" (while the "first collection" does): of all the cantos in the "first collection," canto 115 is the most explicitly introspective and personal, and quite possibly Pound was not confident of such poetic self-revelation, and in retrospect chose to leave the position once occupied by canto 115 vacant for the time being, to be reconsidered at a later opportunity. He did choose to transfer two paradisal passages from the "first collection" canto 115 into DH1 canto 114—

? to all men for an instant?  
beati  
the sky leaded with elm boughs

and

A blown husk that is finished  
but the light sings eternal  
a pale flare over marshes  
where the salt hay whispers to tide's change

but not the passages of exposed personal emotion. Later, when reading the first authorized edition's proofs in 1968, Pound would return to these passages with a different sense of their worth, but in the spring of 1960 it seems he was hesitant to incorporate them into his *paradiso*.

The few changes which occur between canto 116 of the "first collection" and the DH1 typescript also reflect these hesitations on Pound's part. For instance, self-revelatory lines such as "And I am not a demigod / The damn stuff won't cohere," and "Who can trace the sense of this palimpsest?" and the irascible "damn it" of the final page of canto 115 in the "first collection" are absent in DH1. As well, a doctrinal command to the poets of Pound's past in the "first collection" canto 116,

To the poets of my Time : Disney  
& quasi-anonimo

"Ah sold mah soul  
to de company stoh"  
honour them

is replaced by a more impersonal passage in the DH1 version:

A little light like a rush light  
to lead back splendour.

Pound did not include a canto CXVII in his correspondence with Hall, although the "first collection" does contain a canto numbered

"117." However, Pound evidently liked three passages in the "first collection" 117, totaling seven lines, because they reappear in revised form in cantos CXI and CXV of the authorized editions:

i.e., the power to issue the currency. (see "Notes for Canto CXI")

Wyndham Lewis chose blindness,

rather than have his mind stop  
(see "From Canto CXV")

in meine Heimat

Kam ich wieder

where the dead walked and the living were

made of cardboard  
(see "From Canto CXV")

Canto 117 of the "first collection" probably included too many infernal references and reflected too pessimistic a view to be commensurate with the "paradiso" Pound hoped to describe in his post-*Thrones* poems, particularly so near the envisioned ending of canto 120.<sup>8</sup> Possibly the authorized version can be interpreted as the product of a mind unable to resist the various forces which prevented a paradisal world view, but in the DH1 collection of 1960, while still at least able to affect the tonal balance of the canto group through editing, he chose to reject a poem claiming "here hell the inferno," which canto 117 of the "first collection" does claim, in favor of a later substitute never to be written.

Pound did some revising between his first and second correspondences with Hall in the spring of 1960, mostly with canto CXV. Hall wrote to Pound in May 1960, expressing his concern about the "exactness" of his type-copying, and his desire that DH1 be proofread and returned to him with final revisions: "If you will correct and assemble a final mss. and return it to me, I'll copy it again (or amend the copy I keep, rather) and return to you your annotated copy—so that you'll have one."<sup>9</sup>

Changes in the DH2 version of some of the poems also shed light on Pound's evolving conception of their meaning at this late point in the *Cantos*. For example, the DH2 canto CXI deletes "from" in the title of its DH1 counterpart, because the passage

20 shillings in "resentment" to Wadsworth, from Town House  
Hartford

Roche-Guyon stoned to death in Gisors  
Power to issue,

au fond,

to tax

is added to the beginning in place of the five dots of the DH1 version

which had pointed to its incompleteness. The DH2 version removes a line “wu / hsieh / szu (heart’s field),” and substitutes two dots. Eva Hesse convincingly argues that the phrase, which is later reinserted into the first authorized edition, is incorrect as it stands, and that “szu” and “hsieh” should be reversed:<sup>10</sup> possibly Pound was unsure of his accuracy as well, and temporarily excluded the passage from the DH2 version. Pound also adds the phrase “that was Napoleon” to the passage “10 years a blessing / five nuisance,” thereby clarifying his reference. The word “wreathe” (“of coral”) in DH1 is altered to “reef,” and “anthesis” (full bloom) is altered to “antithesis,” which is reversed to “anthesis” in the first authorized edition. Most importantly, the DH2 version adds a final section to the canto, removing the word “Serenitas” which ended the DH1 canto:

Coined gold  
also bumped off 8000 byzantines  
Edictum prologo  
Rothar.

The change recalls the socioeconomic concern of *Thrones* which Pound gradually relinquishes in the process of composing and rewriting his final cantos; the paradisal ending of the earlier version of canto CXI is dispensed with, as if he is now deliberately beginning to reflect in his text the difficulty in sustaining a poetic paradiso.

Between the first and second versions of cantos 110 to 116 sent to Hall, Pound revised canto CXV extensively as well. The second correspondence with Hall includes a canto “115”; except for the replacement of “accepted” by “chose” in the third line of the New Directions “From Canto CXV,” the two are substantively identical. Most of the poem comes from canto 115 of the “first collection,” except for a line “night under wind mid garofani,” and the passage

Time, space,  
neither life nor death is the answer  
and of men seeking good,  
doing evil

both of which seem to have been composed and added between the DH1 and DH2 correspondence. The final three lines are an adaptation of a four-line passage in the “first collection” canto 117:

in meine Heimat  
Kam ich wieder  
where the dead walked & the living were made of cardboard

This last insertion parallels Pound’s removal, in DH2, of the word “Serenitas” from the DH1 version of “From CXI.” Between the time

canto 115 of the “first collection” was composed and the writing of the second correspondence version to Hall, Pound rejected a paradisal ending to the canto for a more troubling finale.

Canto 116 of the DH2 version reveals some interesting changes from its predecessors as well. After the fourth line in DH1 116 we read:

To achieve the possible,  
Mus, wrecked for an error  
But the record, the palimpsest -

In DH2 Pound has expanded and focused the passage:

To achieve human order,  
To precede the possible,  
Mus, wrecked for an error  
But the record, the palimpsest -

One other alteration occurs at the end of the canto. The final two lines of DH1, “A little light like a rush light / to lead back splendour,” become “A little love like a rush light / to lead back to splendour” in DH2. Although the pirated New York 1967 edition uses the version of the poem in the latter collection, Pound apparently preferred the earlier version, for it is employed, with some small substantive changes, in the first authorized edition. The personalized voice reemerges from the “first collection” in this version of canto CXVI too, after its absence in the DH1 group: “And I am not a demigod / the damn stuff will not cohere?” James Laughlin would forgo it again in the first authorized edition, although the 1968 proofs show that Pound intended it to remain.<sup>11</sup> Pound’s early indecision regarding its inclusion, however, reflects the larger uncertainty concerning self-revelation which *Drafts & Fragments* as a whole communicates.

The second canto group sent to Hall in 1960 is the final collection of cantos 110 to 116 that Pound wrote. The publication history of these cantos between 1962 and 1966 suggests that Pound remained uncertain of the final form several of them were to assume. Even his desire to have them appear in print is disputable. Hall had sent Laughlin a copy of the DH2 typescript in June 1960, and Laughlin wrote to Pound, upon receiving this material:

Let me say that there is some really marvellous stuff in this new material. Absolutely beautiful. I've asked Hall to let me know as soon as possible exactly what portions “Paris Review” plans to use, and then perhaps you will instruct me about placing the new Cantos in various magazines here.<sup>12</sup>  
Receiving no answer, he queried Pound again in August of that year.

Pound eventually dictated the various selections, but their placement was not his choice nor, seemingly, his interest.

Laughlin chose the publications in which the poems appeared, with two exceptions. In the spring of 1962 *Threshold*<sup>13</sup> printed the first page of the "first collection" version of canto CXV, and four months later *Paris Review*<sup>14</sup> carried the DH2 version: these selections were made by Hall and Plimpton from the transcripts in the former's possession. Between 1962 and 1966 Laughlin sent Pound's selections to five different magazines. In the autumn of 1962 *Poetry* printed "From Canto CXIII," which follows a portion of the DH2 version,<sup>15</sup> and *Agenda* published "From Canto CXI," an exact copy of the DH1 version, in the spring of 1963.<sup>16</sup>

A few months later *National Review* carried a page entitled "Mindscapes," which contained various fragments of five (untitled) cantos.<sup>17</sup> The first two passages are from portions of DH1 or DH2 canto CX. The third passage is comprised of the last thirteen lines of DH1 or DH2 "CXII." The final seventeen lines of DH2 "CXIII" form the fourth passage (later to become fragment #1 of the first authorized edition's "Notes for Canto CXVII et seq."), and the seventeen lines of the DH2 version of CXIV comprise the last passage. These were reprinted in *Agenda* in December 1963 in a special issue honoring Pound's eightieth birthday. In *Agenda* the poem fragments have numerical headings which conform to the cantos of which they are a part in the authorized texts, with one exception. The fourth *National Review* entry when reprinted in *Agenda* is headed "Unassigned," suggesting that Pound was at that time in the process of reconsidering its placement in the larger grouping. The final *National Review* entry is headed "From CXV," indicating that Pound had not yet decided which version of canto 115 ("first collection" or DH2) he wanted to keep. *Agenda* also printed "From Canto 115" in the fall of 1965 which, with the exception of some accidentals, is a replica of the DH2 "115."<sup>18</sup> (In the same year, in time for Pound's eightieth birthday, Guy Davenport printed eighty copies of canto CX, having obtained the original from James Laughlin: it is identical to the DH2 canto CX. Ten copies were numbered, and none were distributed except by Pound himself to friends. (Davenport kept proof copies, which he felt it was "an infringement of the copyright law to part with,"<sup>19</sup> and hence this particular version has been kept privately by various individuals.) In the spring of 1966 the DH1 canto "CX" was reprinted, along with DH2 "Canto 116," in the *Niagara Frontier Review*.<sup>20</sup>

This is the extent of the authorized publication of post-*Thrones*

cantos before 1967. The various versions of each canto utilized by Pound suggest that the final form of cantos 113, 115, and 116 was still unresolved in his mind. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any canto numbered higher than 116 that Pound was considering for publication. The most one can say with certainty concerning Pound's relationship with his post-*Thrones* cantos by 1966 is that he often approved of more than one version of a canto, and that although the evidence suggests he was no longer actively revising them (that process seems to have stopped with the DH2 collection), he was often undecided as to final selection.

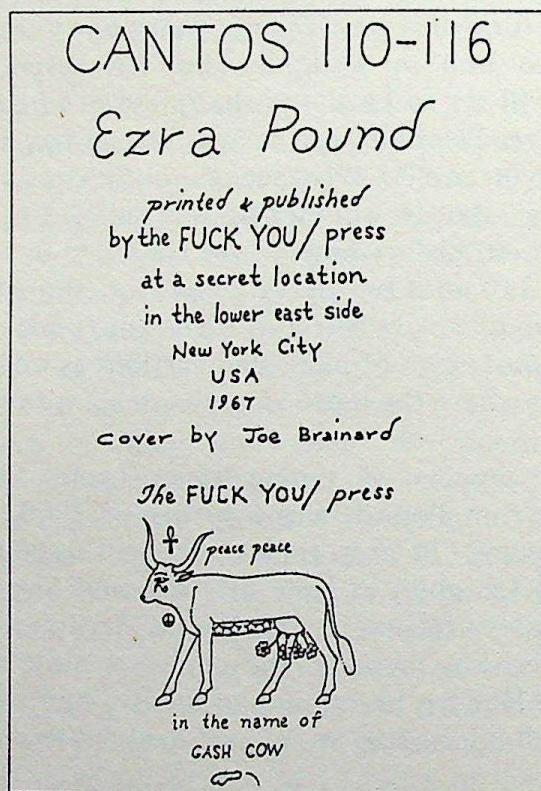
In 1965 the idea of a post-*Thrones* volume including this material was suggested to him by Laughlin, but his response was merely conciliatory: "I will try to look into the question of draft of cantos. I haven't much here. Please let me have a list of what has been printed where, as far as you can."<sup>21</sup> Whether or not he considered publishing them as a volume—that is, whether he was satisfied with the sequence (and the composition history hints to the contrary) or with the number of poems (only 110 to 116)—is thus very questionable. Clearly the multiple and often extensive revisions each canto underwent from 1959 to 1960, and the variations of published versions as well, suggest Pound was not at a point where the more vigorous demands of a volume could be met.

During the process of typing clean copies of both sets of correspondence from Pound in the spring of 1960, Hall made two carbons of each page. (The top copies were sent to Pound in Italy, one set of carbons to Laughlin in June of 1960, and one set was kept by Hall; the top copies are now in the Pound Archives at the Beinecke Library.) The decision to make the copies is quite understandable; Pound had asked Hall for his opinion of the five cantos shown to him in Rome. Hence Hall felt he had an interest in and a responsibility toward these cantos.

Shortly thereafter, Hall, who had resided in England in 1959–60, returned to the United States to resume his teaching position at the University of Michigan. One of his undergraduate students there was Tom Clark, who was interested in Pound's poetry and was working on an Honors thesis, "The Formal Structure of Ezra Pound's *Cantos*." As an assistance to Clark's endeavors in this area, Hall lent him the DH2 typescript (cantos 110 to 116), which was then retyped by a friend of Clark, Robert Howell, and a carbon made, which remained in Clark's possession. From 1963 to 1967 Clark lived in England, studying Pound's poetry under the supervision of Donald Davie at Cambridge;

he showed the typescript to several aficionados there, but it seems that no further copies were made at that time. Clark returned to the United States in 1967 and while in New York City met Ed Sanders:

I bumped into Ed Sanders while walking down St. Marks Place, between 2nd and 3rd Aves . . . Sanders said, as I recall, "Got any manuscripts we can instantly freak into print?" It was a fairly casual question. Sanders was a zealous and aggressive underground publisher; I was poetry editor of the "Paris Review," and as such, usually had various manuscripts in hand.<sup>22</sup>



No doubt the question *was* casual enough, and both Clark and Sanders felt the subsequent publication of the material to be so too, guessing that Pound was too old, and too ill ever to release it on his own.<sup>23</sup> The Howell version of the DH2 typescript was retyped on Gestetner paper, mimeographed on a machine in Sanders' apartment on Avenue A (the "secret location in the lower east side" of the edition's cover), with 300 copies produced. Sanders, a student of classical languages, added the Greek words in longhand, as well as those Chinese ideograms which he could decipher and reproduce. The complete process of publication

"took only a few days": the bulk of the edition was sold to Bob Wilson of the Phoenix Bookshop in New York, while the rest of the copies were shared by Sanders and Clark and distributed to friends of theirs. Hence the resulting edition, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound: 110–116*, is a copy of a copy of the DH2 collection: accidental changes do exist between the DH2 typescript and the pirated volume but, except for a couple of visual misreadings in Canto CX, no substantive errors were incorporated into the new edition.

James Laughlin first saw the pirated edition a short time after its release in the fall of that year, and immediately voiced his displeasure to an apprehensive Sanders in a decidedly non-“casual” setting, the Russian Tea Room on 57th Street. Laughlin reasoned that the unauthorized edition demanded a quick rebuttal from New Directions, which took the form of the 1968 first authorized edition, entitled *Drafts & Fragments*. As he wrote to an interested party in September 1968:

One reason for putting this New Directions *Drafts & Fragments* out fast, is to try to stop some more piracies of the Ed Sanders kind, his disgusting mimeographed version which he had made up from typescripts which he must have gotten from one of the poets to whom Ezra had sent them . . . It was on the basis of this piracy that I was able to persuade Ezra to do some work in putting these Drafts and Fragments into shape and let us bring them out now.<sup>24</sup>

One of Laughlin's main objections to the Sanders edition, of course, was its abuse of copyright, and the New Directions *Drafts & Fragments* received its stimulus from his desire to “get some copyright protection” for Pound's post-*Thrones* canto material. In the summer of 1968 Laughlin described Pound's situation, and the likely outcome of the pressure he exerted on Pound to fashion the material for publication:

I now hear from him in Venice that the work is proceeding, though it is slow, because his eyes are in bad shape. It sounds as though what we will get will be about 20 to 30 pages of the portions of Cantos 110 to 117 which he has completed. So I think we will have to have some title such as “Draft of Cantos 110 to 117.” There is precedent for this title as the first 30, when they were first done here, were titled “A Draft of Thirty Cantos.”

(Later Laughlin would revise this postulated title to its present form.) Laughlin could have simply added the new volume of poetry to the complete *Cantos*, as of course happened by 1970, but publication of a separate volume seemed more likely to “get the special attention . . . to head off piracy.” This decision resulted in the first authorized text, a limited edition of 310 copies in December 1968, hand-printed by the

Stone Wall Press in Iowa City under the direction of Kim Merker, of which 100 were for Faber in London, England, 200 for New Directions, and 10 for the Stone Wall Press. Laughlin anticipated receiving one hundred dollars per copy for the latter edition, and declined to advertise it, rightly assuming that it would "sell itself by word of mouth." Laughlin also had three "good" magazines publish some material of his choice before the release of his own edition, in order quickly to restore Pound's credibility. The *New Yorker* printed "From Canto CXIII" ("Then a partridge-shaped cloud over dust storm . . . but the mind as Ixion, unstill, ever turning") in November 1968.<sup>25</sup> *Stony Brook* carried the complete canto CXIV with one accidental change in the fall of that year,<sup>26</sup> and in the winter of 1969 *Sumac* published "Notes for Canto CXI" (only substituting "Yu" for "Hui" in line 2) and "Notes for a Later Canto"<sup>27</sup> (Laughlin's choice of heading). The latter entry became fragment #3 of "Notes for CXVII et seq."

There is no evidence that Pound ever saw the Sanders piracy. That is, his choice of material to send in response to Laughlin's request was his own, and was not influenced by the content of that edition. However, Pound revised from the DH2 version of all the cantos, and sent retyped versions of each to Laughlin. The canto 114 which he sent was taken from the "first collection" version, with some changes that had been incorporated into the DH1 and DH2 CXIV version. In 1959 Pound had written out in longhand an untitled passage which he decided to include (as fragment #2) along with sections deleted from the last page of DH2 canto CXIII (fragment #3) and the "first collection" canto CXVII (fragment #3). Pound often deferred to Olga Rudge's advice and intuition in the matter of selecting the material to be sent for publication. Laughlin suggests that this might have been the case with the decision to include "Addendum for C" and the following two fragments. "Addendum for C" had been published in *Vice Versa* in 1941 with the title "Canto proceeding (circa 72)"; Pound sent it to Laughlin headed "from Canto C." Pound uncovered longhand versions of the two fragments which follow, and typed them up to be included as they are in the New Directions and Faber volumes. Laughlin was clearly puzzled by Pound's wish to include these three additions, and worried that, if numbered as part of canto C, they would make a volume title problematic, and confuse the reader. Hence he suggested to Pound that they be included in the *Drafts & Fragments* volume after canto 116 and before the 117 fragments:

My suggestion, if this bit eventually is to be added to 100, is to put it at the end of the book, with the fragments . . . Am I right

that you now want it to be hitched eventually onto or into, #100? . . . If you want it fitted into 100 next time we reprint the big book with *Thrones* added (as well as in the new little book) let me know where it goes in 100 and I'll try to figure out how we can manage it.<sup>28</sup>

Laughlin was forced to make this decision himself however, because Pound never answered his question.

During the spring and summer of 1968 Laughlin was in contact with Pound concerning the proofreading of the typescripts, and offered suggestions for changes. Pound's replies were often no longer than one or two words, implying not only ill health and poor vision, but a certain weariness with the whole procedure—hardly surprising considering he was an uninterested proofreader throughout his career, let alone with a volume he was forced, in ill-health and old age, to oversee. Most of the questions dealt with spacing, typesetting, the exact rendering of the Na-khi words in cantos CX and CXII, and Chinese ideograms. Laughlin collaborated with other New Directions editors (in particular Robert Macgregor) and with Eva Hesse to correct Pound's sometimes erroneous comments in these proofs, and to make seemingly necessary changes. While most changes were of accidentals and were appropriate, some were made in error. Pound had clearly added exclamation marks to the ends of the lines "Falling spiders and scorpions" and "give light against falling poison" of canto CX in the 1968 proofs (they appear in the typescripts, too); they were deleted by New Directions in the 1970 complete *Cantos* but should be reincorporated. Eva Hesse requested that "Gold mermaid" be changed to "Cold mermaid" for the 1970 complete *Cantos* canto CXI, and it was. As she wrote to Laughlin, "cold more plausible than gold."<sup>29</sup> Again, there was no substantial reason for the change (and in fact the typescripts clearly show Pound wanted "Gold"). In June 1975, Hesse requested it be restored to "Gold" but the correction was not incorporated.<sup>30</sup>

Hesse was also skeptical of the title "Notes for canto CXVII et seq." and questioned Laughlin as to whether it was in fact Pound's creation. If it was (and there is no indication of this on the 1968 proof copy), why did Laughlin publish the third fragment in *Sumac* under the heading "Notes for a later Canto"? The logical inference is that Pound did not dictate a heading for the three fragments after canto CXVI, and that Laughlin was forced to provide one. Although the decision was not unwarranted, at a strategic point in the *Cantos* it falsely serves to confirm intentions which did not necessarily exist. However, considering that Pound had reorganized the various passages during the period

of composition, he evidently liked them but had not, even by 1968, decided where to use them. A heading such as "Notes for a Later Canto" would have suggested to the reader that their present location at the end of *Drafts & Fragments* is somewhat tentative.

The canto which ends the New Directions 1973 volume of the *Cantos* is clearly an editorial blunder. Pound never intended the lines to be printed, let alone be considered the "end" of his work: they were originally part of canto CXV and deliberately excluded from it by Pound when sending Laughlin the typescripts reworked from the DH2 version, in 1968. Mary de Rachewiltz confirms this, claiming that Pound had decided that the last line to be printed in the *Drafts & Fragments* volume was "to be men not destroyers" of the "Notes for CXVII et seq." (fragment #3). Laughlin included the "CXX" lines for copyright protection, because they were printed without Pound's authorization (extracted from the *Threshold* version of canto 115) in *The Anonym Quarterly* in 1969;<sup>31</sup> however, he should simply have headed them "a fragment" and declined to attribute to them a number of such import. Barbara Eastman, in her doctoral thesis,<sup>32</sup> argues convincingly that Sheri Martinelli, a painter friend of Pound from his St. Elizabeth's stay, was responsible for the poem's appearance. The numbered title of the poem, "CXX," seems to consider the three fragments of "Notes for CXVII et seq." to be sequential separate cantos, producing numbers 117, 118, and 119 (precisely the fault of that title). Martinelli was also probably aware, as Charles Norman was (and he might have been her source) that Pound hoped "to make it to 120,"<sup>33</sup> and decided she would comply for Pound since he had evidently neglected to do so himself. Peter du Sautoy, an editor of Faber in London, declined to print the poem in his 1975 edition of the *Cantos*, suspecting that it did not represent Pound's desired close.

Pound actually showed Laughlin what the proper ending was to be in 1966. Pound's subsequent decision not to include this ending is puzzling; it is a poem dedicating the *Cantos* to Olga Rudge, and praising her for her "courage." It is presently in her possession, and she is to publish it at her own discretion, hence preventing Laughlin from using it in his editions. However, Pound wanted the dedication to be placed at the end of the *Cantos*, and not simply to be included with the *Drafts & Fragments* poems which, for Pound in 1968, were not necessarily to be the conclusion of the work.

As far as one can adequately judge a text's history and its ramifications in a situation like this, it appears that Pound was not exhibiting indifference to the publication of cantos CX to CXVII in the

*Cantos*, but yielding to the various pressures of an unauthorized edition and poor health. All indications suggest that Pound never intended even the separate early publication of these cantos in journals, and that he was directed toward publishing them by Laughlin and Olga Rudge. That is, these cantos should certainly be considered as notes toward a further volume, but not as a final statement by Pound, not as his definitive close. ("Drafts" does not convey this, because the first volume of the *Cantos* is headed "A Draft of Thirty Cantos.") Pound's *Drafts & Fragments* is a tentative movement toward ending the *Cantos*, and instead of perceiving the volume as a finalized aesthetic object, we should be careful to perceive it as a "historical document" of a stage, nowhere near finalized, which Pound had reached in 1960 before ceasing to write altogether, for various reasons, both of a personal and a technical nature.

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of all editorial changes in cantos CX to CXVII (and the very questionable addition of "CXX" to the 1972 New Directions edition), see Barbara Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos: The Story of the Text, 1948-75* (Orono: Univ. of Maine Press, 1979), pp. 26-29, 35-37, and 129-41.

<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Mary de Rachewiltz, Feb. 15, 1982, at Yale University.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, James J. Wilhelm, *The Later Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: Walker, 1977), pp. 8 and 199.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra Pound to Harry Meacham, as quoted in Harry Meacham, *The Caged Panther* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 141: "My characters have now passed through Hell and Purgatory and are somewhere in Paradise. When you paint on a big canvas . . . you have to start colors down here . . . but it all ties in. . . ." See also Donald Hall, ed., "Ezra Pound: An Interview," *Paris Review*, 28 (1962), 47: "It is difficult to write a paradiso when all the superficial indications are that you ought to write an apocalypse. It is obviously much easier to find inhabitants for an inferno or even a purgatorio."

<sup>5</sup> In the Pound Archives, Beinecke Rare Books Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

<sup>6</sup> Hall, "Ezra Pound: An Interview," p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Hall, Letter to Ezra Pound, May 21, 1960, in the Pound Archives, Beinecke Rare Books Library.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Norman, *Ezra Pound* (London: Macdonald, 1969), p. 465: "Pound told a visitor he hoped 'to make it to 120.'" Hugh Kenner, in *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 540, claims Pound was hoping to reach canto 124.

<sup>9</sup> Donald Hall, Letter to Ezra Pound, May 21, 1960, in the Pound Archives, Beinecke Rare Books Library.

<sup>10</sup> Ezra Pound, *Letzte Texte (Cantos CX-CXX) Entwürfe & Fragmente*, ed. and trans. Eva Hesse (Munich: Aachen, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Pound signed the proofs of *Drafts & Fragments* in August 1968 in Venice.

They are in the New Directions Archive at Mr. Laughlin's home in Norfolk, Conn.

<sup>12</sup> James Laughlin, Letter to Ezra Pound, June 9, 1960, in the Pound Archives, Beinecke Rare Books Library.

<sup>13</sup> "Fragment from Canto 115," *Threshold*, 17 (1962), 20.

<sup>14</sup> "Two Cantos," *Paris Review*, 28 (Summer/Fall 1962), 13–14.

<sup>15</sup> "From Canto CXIII" *Poetry*, 101 (Oct./Nov. 1962), 95–96.

<sup>16</sup> "From Canto CXI," *Agenda*, II, 11/12 (Mar./Apr. 1963), 1–2.

<sup>17</sup> "Mindscapes," *National Review*, XV, 10 (Sept. 1963), 197.

<sup>18</sup> "From Canto 115," *Agenda*, IV, 2 (Oct./Nov. 1965), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Guy Davenport, Letter to James Laughlin, Feb. 11, 1966, in Mr. Laughlin's personal archives, at his home in Norfolk, Conn.

<sup>20</sup> "Canto CX," *Niagara Frontier Review*, I (Spring 1966), 29–36.

<sup>21</sup> Ezra Pound, Letter to James Laughlin, Feb. 12, 1965. The typescript of the letter questions the exact date, but the year is correct.

<sup>22</sup> Letter received from Tom Clark, Oct. 26, 1982.

<sup>23</sup> This was Sanders' rationalization in a personal interview in Toronto, March 30, 1982. Clark, in his letter of Oct. 26, 1982, adds that he "had no evidence that the Canto-fragments would ever appear in print, and probably assumed that they were unlikely ever to do so—if only because of their fragmentary state."

<sup>24</sup> James Laughlin, Letter to Robert Gales, Sept. 9, 1968, in Mr. Laughlin's personal archives, at his home in Norfolk, Conn.

<sup>25</sup> "From Canto CXIII," *New Yorker*, 30 Nov. 1968, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> "Canto CXIV," *Stony Brook*, 1/2 (Fall 1968), 1–3.

<sup>27</sup> "Notes for CXI" and "Notes for a Later Canto," *Sumac*, 1/2 (Winter 1969), 5–7.

<sup>28</sup> James Laughlin, Letter to Ezra Pound, June 22, 1968, in Mr. Laughlin's personal archives, at his home in Norfolk, Conn.

<sup>29</sup> Eva Hesse, Letter to James Laughlin, June 4, 1969, in Mr. Laughlin's personal archives, at his home in Norfolk, Conn.

<sup>30</sup> Other accidentals were made, as listed in Eastman, *Ezra Pound's Cantos: The Story of the Text, 1948–75*, pp. 129–41.

<sup>31</sup> "CXX," *Anonym Quarterly*, 4 (Summer 1969), 1. William Cookson wrote Mr. Laughlin in 1973 that Pound had told him the lines were unauthorized in the *Anonym* publication. (From Mr. Laughlin's personal archives, at his home in Norfolk, Conn.)

<sup>32</sup> Barbara Eastman, "Building the Temple; An Interpretative Study of Section: Rock Drill 85–95 de los Cantares of Ezra Pound," Diss. Oxford, 1977.

<sup>33</sup> Norman, *Ezra Pound*, p. 465.

# The Pose of Imposture: Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"

LEE EDELMAN

"Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror": the very title poses the problem raised by Ashbery's poem—a problem that itself might be formulated in terms of posing and imposture, a vocabulary of disguise that introduces doubt into the representation of the self. The title, of course, announces the text's engagement of the issue of representation and, specifically, of the difficulties that inhere in the attempt to represent oneself. For the image constitutive of a self-portrait demands that it be read in some relation to the original; but as Ashbery's poem indicates, the nature of the "original" is often far from clear. Douglas Crase has suggested that Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" points to the convexity or distortion implicit in any enterprise of self-depiction.<sup>1</sup> By carrying Crase's observation one step further, however, we may note that the effect of convexity in Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" is to redirect attention from the portrait of the "self" to the distinctive *angle* of that portrayal. The subject, then, is less the portraitist than the problematic nature of the portraiture; for the text announces the self-portrait's generic imperative to mirror not the "self," but the process of mirroring the "self," its persistent concern, in other words, with the representation of (self) representation.

Since the attempt to represent representation, however, always finds itself mediated by anterior representations, the self-portrait can only offer its representation of representation as an interpretation of an earlier representation of representation. We have entered, then, a hall of mirrors, or in Joyce's words from *Ulysses*, "a mirror within a mirror." And as a result, the vexing convexity of Ashbery's aesthetic "mirror"

may seem, if not to have invested itself and thereby become concave, to have conned us at any rate into Plato's cave where the shadows of shadows beguile us with a seemingly endless chain of displacements.

Critics who would place themselves in control of this process try to twist that chain upon itself by defining its circuit as "self-reflexive."<sup>2</sup> But the inadequacy of that term to the situation at hand becomes obvious if one attends carefully to the system of displacements here at work. For if the representation of the "self" is, in fact, a representation of the representation of the "self," and *that* representation is, in turn, an interpretation of some other representation of some other "self," the identity of the "self" is too gravely in doubt to allow this process to be explained away as neatly "self-reflexive." Instead, we must ask with the seriousness latent in all rhetorical questions (to the extent that they constitute questions of rhetoric): who is it that Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" actually portrays?

Asking such a question inevitably leads back to the title and to the question raised by the title—a question that takes shape as a question of title. For we must ask ourselves who has title to this title, and what entitles Ashbery to appropriate it as his own. The title that names the poem, that seems to identify its distinctive property, bestows upon the text the proper name of another, thus providing the property with a name that is, as it turns out, not strictly proper. It is Parmigianino, of course, who is entitled to this title beneath which Ashbery's poem poses as if it were its own. And Ashbery, from the outset, acknowledges the painter's prior claim, beginning his own "Self-Portrait": "As Parmigianino did it."<sup>3</sup> By presenting his poem under the name of Parmigianino's painting, Ashbery seems to indicate that the earlier work of art serves, in some sense, as the model for his own artistic endeavor.

But this too leads to complications. What, after all, does it mean for something to serve as a "model"? In the domain of the plastic arts—the domain suggested by Parmigianino's "Self-Portrait"—a model may be that person or object that the work of art attempts to imitate, the original that the creation seeks to double or reproduce. Yet if the model possesses the priority and the authenticity that derive from its status as the "original," the word "model," in another sense, implies a crucial *lack* of authenticity to the extent that it signifies a reproduction of some *other* object, a replica or a copy, frequently on a scale much smaller than that of what it represents. The "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror"—both as title and as genre—becomes, in this way, a machine for the production of reproductions claiming title as "originals": and the title of Ashbery's poem, therefore, by designating Parmigianino's self-portrait as its

model, only inscribes an uncertainty into all of the relationships opening out from that title—an undecidability that centers on questions of authenticity and imposture.

Once more, then, we return to the title, this time to view it in relation to the text; but to do so we must consider first the poetics of the title, an issue central to Ashbery's investigations of the issue of centrality. Ashbery himself, in interviews, has discussed the importance of titles and the role that they play in the creation of his poetry.<sup>4</sup> In *As We Know* he calls attention to this concern in a group of poems, each of which takes shape as a single sentence played out across the title and the single line of the poem's text proper. One, for example, is called "The Cathedral Is" and it consists of one line: "Slated for demolition." Such a work forces us to interrogate the nature of any title. It forces us to suspend our assumption that a title like "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" will be metaphoric—a large box to contain the poem by means of some essential correspondence—and to consider the possibility that it may announce a purely metonymic relationship—a relationship governed only by chance or contiguity. It compels us, therefore, to question the *place* of the title. Is it situated outside the text, presiding over it from a privileged, authoritative position to enunciate the text's authentic name—the name that articulates its essential character? Or is the title itself inside the text, and thus far from being conclusive, or privileged, or authentic, always necessarily partial, always necessarily *textual*? To put the matter another way, we must ask not only if the title names the text properly, but also if the title is, properly, a name at all.

To ask in what way "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" names Ashbery's poem, then, is to begin to bring into relation the various differences that inhabit the title—differences between Parmigianino and Ashbery, between representation and misrepresentation, between metaphor and metonymy. It is to recognize that the title, insofar as it identifies the literary object by bestowing a name upon it, aspires to the patriarchal prerogative of the proper name. A sexual thematics thus informs the questioning of the title that has been raised in terms of rhetoric above. That is to say, if the title can be placed in a metaphoric "relation to the text, if it can assume, to use Roman Jakobson's term, a "paradigmatic" function so that Ashbery's poem can be seen to *be*, or to *be like*, a self-portrait in a convex mirror, then the title can be said to name the text "properly," to identify it legitimately in terms of resemblance or correspondence. This association of metaphor with the production—or the reproduction—of legitimate substitutes springs, as Jonathan Culler points out, from the privileged position that

patriarchal cultures accord "metaphorical relations—relations of resemblance between separate items that can be substituted for one another, such as obtain between the father and the miniature replica with the same name, the child."<sup>5</sup>

As a metaphor, then, the title would claim an essentially phallic authority as superscription. It would participate in a system of patriarchal values centering on the determinacy of truth, on the certainty of origins, and, indeed, on the very notion of centrality itself. It is that system, with its emphasis on truth as presence and as unity, a system underwritten by the visibility and "presence" of the phallus, that Derrida has labeled "phallogocentrism."<sup>6</sup> By seeing the phallus as implicated in the nostalgia for presence at work in logocentrism, Derrida, as he himself makes explicit, takes aim at Lacan and at what he sees as Lacan's concept of the phallus as a transcendental or "privileged signifier," as that which grounds or gives meaning to the play of all other signifiers.<sup>7</sup> In opposition to such a designation of the phallus as primary and unique, Derrida declares, "It is one and the same system: the erection of a paternal logos . . . and the phallus as 'privileged signifier' (Lacan)."<sup>8</sup> Thus insofar as the title as a metaphor seeks to define the text in terms of essence or essential correspondence, it aspires to the phallic authority central to phallogocentrism. And in so doing it asserts the legitimacy and the intelligibility of that text that it seeks to name by affirming the certainty of its paternity, the unmistakable resemblance it bears to its origin.

Yet as the questions raised earlier have already made clear, the legitimacy of this title as a name for the text is precisely what remains uncertain. For the title here, to the extent that it functions metonymically rather than metaphorically, rejects the vertical hierarchy of Jakobson's paradigmatic relations in favor of the more random, horizontal displacements of a syntagmatic chain. We can see this by noting that the title of Ashbery's poem does not merely stand over the text magisterially, designating the poem as "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." It simultaneously finds itself implicated in the syntactical structure of the opening line, thus disseminating itself and denying any claim to the superior authority of a privileged, determinate meaning. After all, the text's initial clause, "As Parmigianino did it" (*SP*, p. 68), refers to the poem's effort of self-representation only by directing us back to the title for the antecedent of "it." Through its involvement in the syntax of these opening words, the title can be viewed as having an aleatory rather than an essential relation to the text. And if, in its metonymic relation to the poem, the title refuses to concentrate

meaning, but disseminates it instead, it is appropriate that it does so by raising the question of antecedents or origins. For dissemination, as Derrida has discussed it, calls origin into question insofar as it is that which does not return to the father—which does not accede to the singularity and intelligibility of “Truth.”

Significantly, the text raises this issue of pronouns in relation to their antecedents not only to question the referent of “it,” but also, and more importantly, to inquire into the referent of the textual “I.” For the “I” of the poem has apparently defined its own antecedent as Parmigianino and his “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror.” But the issue of literary genealogy is more complex than that. In what way can Parmigianino’s “Self-Portrait” be seen as the antecedent of Ashbery’s text? Surely not in the sense of a precursor, for as Harold Bloom has noted, Ashbery’s literary roots here “are not so much in Parmigianino as in Stevens.”<sup>9</sup> Bloom goes on to posit a revisionary relationship between Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait” and Stevens’ “Poem with Rhythms.” I would suggest, however, that the Stevensian connection may be explored at least as profitably by viewing “Self-Portrait” as a commentary of sorts on “The Man with the Blue Guitar.”<sup>10</sup>

In such a context one might consider the ways in which Ashbery’s revisionary reading of Stevens—conducted by means of his meditation on Parmigianino—parallels Stevens’ response to Whitman—conducted by means of his meditation on Picasso. The full unraveling of that correspondence is the subject for another occasion; at present I want only to note that just as Ashbery’s poem presents itself under the name of Parmigianino’s painting, so Parmigianino himself serves here as an alias, a cover, for the true literary antecedents of Ashbery’s speculations—“From the Latin *speculum*, mirror” (*SP*, p. 69)—on the enterprise of representing the self. These numerous acts of impersonation—these acts of misrepresentation—expose an element of duplicity at the very core of Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” and they point at the same time to an anxiety about its own authenticity. The poem’s representation of representation as misrepresentation leads, then, to one final question concerning the title. If Parmigianino’s painting—or Stevens’ poetry designated obliquely by means of that painting—serves as the model for Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait,” how can the poem, in fact, be a self-portrait unless the significance of the self is severely qualified or directly called into question?

Stevens, of course, throughout “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” returns insistently to the questioning of the self in its relation to the world beyond it; and the affirmation at which he finally arrives is of the

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power of the poetic self to affirm itself by means of its own internalized strength:

Here I inhale profounder strength  
And as I am, I speak and move

And things are as I think they are  
And say they are on the blue guitar.

(XXVIII, 11–14)

The imagination's imperative takes the world as its mirror so that the poet is able to appropriate the reality outside himself as his own. In this way he can see in it an image of himself so that "Franciscan don was never more / Himself than in this fertile glass" (XXIX, 15–16). So potent is the solipsism of this enlarged, this capacious self—a self descended from the Whitmanian persona celebrated in "Song of Myself," and evoked by Stevens as "A substitute for all the gods: / This self, not that gold self aloft, // Alone, one's shadow magnified" (XXI, 1–3)—that the problem encountered in the attempt to represent it—or, in Stevens' words, to "play man number one" (III, 1)—is the difficulty of finding a way to depict a self that is so all-encompassing as to evade any definition whatsoever:

Where  
Do I begin and end? And where

As I strum the thing, do I pick up  
That which momentously declares

Itself not to be I and yet  
Must be. It could be nothing else.  
(XII, 7–12)

Any form of representation must inevitably limit such a self, and it is in the recognition not only of the limits of representation, but also of representation itself as a *mode* of limitation, that Stevens provides the insight upon which Ashbery's text enlarges.<sup>11</sup> For in his undersong Stevens acknowledges an emptiness, a gap, or what he calls "an absence," that inhabits reality and the imagination both. "Poetry is the subject of the poem," he writes, "From this it issues and // To this returns" (XXI, 1–3). But he adds that "Between the two, / Between issue and return, there is // An absence in reality" (XXI, 3–5) and that absence, he suggests, may be "an absence for the poem" (XXI, 8).

That more profound absence takes shape as a questioning of the spiritualized, the transcendental claims made on behalf of the self. Where Whitman had written in "Song of Myself":

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater than one's self is

(1269-71)

Stevens darkly counters by proposing that

The person has a mould. But not  
Its animal. The angelic ones

Speak of the soul, the mind. It is  
An animal. The blue guitar—  
On that its claws propound, its fangs  
Articulate its desert days.

The blue guitar a mould? That shell?  
(XVII, 1-7)

In the hollow of this empty aesthetic shell, Ashbery's text finds its opening, the gap on which it builds; it discovers the initiating insight through which it can offer its own contribution to the dialogue between Whitman and Stevens that centers on the relationship of the body and soul, reality and imagination, reduction and transcendence. "The secret is too plain," Ashbery's poem asserts in what may be its most widely quoted lines:

The pity of it smarts,  
Makes hot tears spurt: that the soul is not a soul,  
Has no secret, is small, and it fits  
Its hollow perfectly: its room, our moment of attention

(SP, p. 69)

The text purports to reveal here that the secret of Parmigianino's painting, like its own secret and, indeed, like the secret of all representations of the self—including those acts of consciousness through which the self is represented to itself *as* itself—lies in the absence, or more precisely, in the fictionality of any autonomous self. The "hot tears" provoked by the knowledge that the painting contains no "soul," no living presence, bemoan as well the absence or hollow at the center of all selfhood, the difference or division that Lacan, for instance, in his "Mirror Stage," sees as constitutive of identity itself. Thus when the poet undertakes to portray himself—and in so doing to render himself both subject and object at once—he recognizes the impossibility of defining any indivisible identity.<sup>12</sup> He recognizes that he is destined to remain the "dreaming model" who merely "considers / Lifting the pencil to the self-portrait" (SP, p. 71) because he understands the artificial, which is to say, the *conventional* nature of all

selfhood. Even in the self-constituting movements of his consciousness, he discovers, as he acknowledges to himself, that “no part / Remains that is surely you” (*SP*, p. 71).

Little wonder, then, that his meditation leads him to feel “like one of those / Hoffmann characters who have been deprived / Of a reflection” (*SP*, p. 74). If he has been “deprived / Of a reflection,” though, it is because he has found himself too accurately reflected in Parmigianino’s “Self-Portrait.” He has seen a reflection of himself there as a fictive or hollow self—as a “self” only insofar as selfhood is a trope that seeks to evade the multiplicity, the internal otherness that he recognizes when

the whole of me  
Is seen to be supplanted by the strict  
Otherness of the painter in his  
Other room

(*SP*, p. 74)

With this the text announces its thematic concern with the element of difference that undermines, even as it underlies, identity. “This otherness, this / ‘Not-being-us’ is all there is to look at / In the mirror” (*SP*, p. 81), Ashbery writes as his text, advertising its deconstructive insight into the metaphysical illusion of self-presence, exposes the alterity that inhabits the self and its representations from the outset.

With regard specifically to principles or modes of representation—with regard, that is, to the Stevensian focus on “the pure good of theory” that forms so prominent a strand of Ashbery’s text—the perception of this “otherness” works against the affirmation of any mimesis predicated upon intrinsic or essential correspondence. To the extent that it makes everything—including the self and its self-portrait—different from and in itself, this “otherness” necessarily subverts the spiritualizing gesture of analogy and violates the perspectival relation between inside and outside on which metaphor as representation rests.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Ashbery’s poem insistently undoes that opposition as it meditates on the image contained in the room of Parmigianino’s painting. It continually shifts perspectives in order to confound any effort to distinguish between an aesthetic, textual, or purely linguistic interior and the historical, experiential reality outside of it. Thus the painting, the poet declares, is “life englobed” (*SP*, p. 69), and in its “room,” which cannot be differentiated from the changing world beyond it, “everything gets ‘programmed’ . . . more keeps getting included / Without adding to the sum” (*SP*, p. 72). In fact, the painting, far from being interpreted as distinct from the flow of history, seems to

"contain this flow like an hour-glass" (*SP*, p. 73) so that the life of the urban landscape itself comes to seem merely "the backing of the looking glass of the / Unidentified but precisely sketched studio" (*SP*, p. 75).

At the same time, however, the text dramatizes a resistance to this undoing of the inside/outside dichotomy. The poet, throughout the first five sections of the poem, willfully attempts to reassert that the painting is a privileged realm of meaning, a domain of interiority linked to presence, fullness, and truth. Thus when the wooden hemisphere becomes "a globe like ours" (*SP*, p. 77), it is viewed as a world that corresponds essentially, and therefore meaningfully, to the world of experience. The poet in this way seeks to affirm that "we are a part of it and / Can live in it as in fact we have done" (*SP*, p. 76) since its "room . . . accommodates everything" (*SP*, p. 77). He wants, in other words, to reclaim the painting's comprehensiveness and its comprehensibility, its plenitude such that we "can live in it" and participate in the presence that it reveals. As I have suggested already, such a system of values provides the ideological foundation for metaphor; it comes as no surprise, then, that the poet sums up this dramatization of a resistance to the text's demystifying insights by explicitly averring that the painting "is a metaphor / Made to include us" (*SP*, p. 76). With this claim he undertakes to deny the displacements effected by metonymy and to affirm that experience

will not take place at random  
 But in an orderly way that means to menace  
 Nobody—the normal way things are done,  
 Like the concentric growing up of days  
 Around a life: correctly, if you think about it.

(*SP*, p. 76)

The poem narrates its refusal of metonymy's "random" juxtapositions with this appeal to the "orderly" and "normal" logic of concentric organization—an organization that underscores belief in the reality of a central, interior truth and that calls to mind such systems of hierarchical arrangement as Dante's vision of heaven and hell. This ideologically freighted concentricity metaphorizes the transcendental impulse at work in metaphor itself. But the text exposes the untenability of this enshrinement of the logocentric ideal, the untenability not only of such explicitly organic metaphors (the "growing up of days") but also, and more importantly, of the organicism inherent in metaphor itself. For even in this attempt to celebrate the concentricity of metaphor, metaphor comes undone as soon as one recognizes the "random" collocation, which is to say, the metonymic relationship, that governs the

accumulation of “days / Around a life”—the metonymic relationship that governs the very vehicle of this metaphor for metaphor.

The text itself, by the time it reaches its final section, must acknowledge this dissolution of every metaphoric necessary into the horizontal displacements of a metonymic contingency:

This always  
Happens, as in the game where  
A whispered phrase passed around the room  
Ends up as something completely different.  
It is the principle that makes works of art so unlike  
What the artist intended.

(SP, p. 80)

Undeceived by metaphor with its claims to authenticity and naturalism, the text reveals the pervasiveness of this “unlike”-ness, the inescapability of differential structures. Even “*this thing, the mute, undivided present*” (SP, p. 80) betrays the distortions of an “otherness . . . changing everything / Slightly and profoundly” (SP, p. 81) so that it too is “completely different” (SP, p. 80) from itself. Such an insistence on the element of difference or textuality inherent in experience refutes what Derrida has discussed as the logocentric metaphysics of presence based on the self-authenticating privilege of speech. “Once it seemed so perfect,” the poet writes with regard to that now displaced presence, “gloss on the fine / Freckled skin, lips moistened as though about to part / Releasing speech” (SP, p. 82). But that natural and immediate self-presence must now be refused as “a frozen gesture of welcome etched / On the air materializing behind it, / A convention” (SP, p. 82). For Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait” undertakes thematically to stage its own deconstruction, to transform the mirror of art into the mirror image of mimesis by representing representation as difference.

It is wholly appropriate, therefore, that in one of its final images the text repudiates its coherence, and thus its own identity, by denying that it has delineated—or that it ever could delineate—any self-portrait at all. “The hand holds no chalk,” the poet, as “dreaming model” (SP, p. 71), declares; and literalizing the enterprise of deconstruction, he adds: “each part of the whole falls off” (SP, p. 83). Thus, in the words of David Shapiro, “It might be said that the poem finally admits no self-portraiture except the portraiture of a text”;<sup>14</sup> or, as Richard Stamelman writes in one of the best deconstructive readings of Ashbery’s poem, “self-portraiture is stripped of authority and authenticity; and knowledge appears as no more than the random coalescence of fragments.”<sup>15</sup>

But there is something troubling about the neatness of this overtly deconstructive "Self-Portrait." On the one hand, the dismemberment imaged here as the aesthetic object is hollowed out—as it falls apart to reveal itself as a "hoard of destructions" (XV, 1–2), to use the phrase from Picasso that Stevens cites in "The Man with the Blue Guitar"—makes explicit the connection between deconstructive reading and the undoing of that discourse of power central to what Derrida describes as phallogocentrism. As I noted earlier, the authoritarian values of autonomy, plenitude, and self-mastery that inform phallogocentrism are grounded in the visible presence of the phallus which becomes a transcendental signifier assuring the fixity, the self-identity of truth. The poem's assertion, then, that "each part of the whole falls off" (*SP*, p. 83) appears to displace the phallic image of unity and comprehensiveness through a dismemberment, a figural castration, that subverts the integrity of the subject of "Self-Portrait." And yet, on the other hand, by imaging the deconstructive pressuring of a text as a dismemberment, as the opening of a hole in what was "whole," the poem points to its own persistent recuperation of the phallus, its own entrapment in what Derrida calls "the snare of truth-castration," the snare of the phallocentric positing of a relation between castration and truth.<sup>16</sup>

This recuperation or ensnarement can be seen, on one level, in the way in which the text aspires thematically to reveal the truth of its own deconstruction, to appropriate to itself a sophisticated awareness of its own discontinuity in order to reassert its ability to know itself. Thus in Stelman's exemplary deconstructive account of the poem, Ashbery's text "lifts the protective veil of artifice from works of poetic and artistic representation, thus opening up their surface to view; a disclosure that shows exactly how poems, stories, and paintings (like Parmigianino's self-portrait) hide, disguise, or suppress realities of temporality and loss."<sup>17</sup> This dramatic unveiling aims to expose the truth of loss, the reality of lack that elsewhere is hidden or disguised; it affirms, that is, castration as truth and thus returns us to the phallogocentric orientation toward truth by making a fetish of castration itself so as to cover up—and *not* to recover—the indeterminacy such lack would imply.

The phallus, even in its "absence," then, remains the privileged signifier that underwrites the poem's fetishistic insistence on the truth of dismemberment or loss. And throughout the poem this fetishism obtrudes to inscribe its refusal of the deconstructive theme that the text would seem to articulate. For example, we learn in the final image that

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the hand of the portraitist "holds no chalk" as "each part of the whole falls off" (*SP*, p. 83), and thus that the phallic instrument of metaphoric representation or self-reproduction is missing or denied. But the text's fetishistic fixation on the hand—its disproportionate attention to the hand's disproportion—has already transformed the hand itself ("bigger than the head" [*SP*, p. 68], looming "large" [*SP*, p. 69], and "on another scale" [*SP*, p. 70]) into a metonymic substitute for the phallus whose absence the text so boldly advertises.

This magnification of the hand, of course, can be seen in Parmigianino's painting, and one might be tempted to attribute its importance in the poem to nothing more than Ashbery's faithful meditation on the earlier work. But the numerous invocations of the hand betray the extent to which the poem has seized upon that aspect of the portrait and placed it in the service of its fetishistic desire. At the outset, for instance, the painting's enlarged hand provokes telling efforts of interpretation in the poem: Ashbery proposes that the hand seeks "to protect / What it advertises" (*SP*, p. 69), reading its swerving gesture as conservative or defensive. As a defensive strategy, however, it aims not "to hide something" (*SP*, p. 69) but to "protect" by advertising or exposing what otherwise remains hidden. In this way even as the hand reveals the room of the portrait as illusion, as a "hollow" (*SP*, p. 69), it can still "loom large" (*SP*, p. 69) enough to convey the pathos of its alleged desire to "stick . . . Out of the globe" (*SP*, p. 69). In other words, while the hand calls attention to its own status as a *painted* hand by showing the painter in the act of creating the portrait, it simultaneously invokes in the text a pathos that obliquely reconstitutes the very illusion of presence that it has dismantled. The poem stresses this conservative element when it reads the hand as working "to fence in and shore up the face" (*SP*, p. 69). Like Eliot's "fragments . . . shored against [his] ruins," this fragmentary, almost disembodied hand ("Roving back to the body of which it seems / So unlikely a part" [*SP*, p. 69]) attempts to reinforce a threatened ideology of fullness and presence, to function both as "fence" and defense against the "vacancy" (*SP*, p. 77) or absence in the painted face.

Gesturing "in pure / Affirmation that doesn't affirm anything" (*SP*, p. 70), the hand takes on the quality of Sidney's poet who "nothing affirms." But while refusing to "affirm anything," the hand, as "pure / Affirmation," *does* affirm its very refusal of affirmation, fetishistically essentializing its own gesture into a "pure" or absolute truth that substitutes for the lack of any object, any *thing* for it to affirm. Ashbery himself has quite cogently discussed, in *Three Poems*, the nature of such

a fetishistic substitution: "details," he writes, "can too easily become fetishes, i.e., become prized for themselves, with no notion of the whole of which they were a part, with only an idolatrous understanding of the qualities of the particular details." And he adds that "Fetichism [sic] comes into being only when there is a past that may seem more or less attractive when compared with the present."<sup>18</sup> Thus the fetish as metonymic displacement not only defends against what Freud views as the "absence" that it confronts, but it also invokes a covert nostalgia for the presence that once was.<sup>19</sup>

Like Parmigianino's painting, then, Ashbery's text has a "secret" that is hidden or "sequestered" (*SP*, p. 68) by being "too plain" (*SP*, p. 69)—a secret that it protects by advertising. What is simultaneously hidden and exposed here is the textual inscription of a nostalgic desire: a desire for presence that will disallow absence or loss, a desire to escape from the pose or positioning of differential language and to break free into something outside the constraints of textuality.<sup>20</sup> Even the evocation of deconstruction as dismemberment figures in the unfolding of this desire to the extent that it occurs in the context of a larger movement toward a recuperation of the past:

The hand holds no chalk  
 And each part of the whole falls off  
 And cannot know it knew, except  
 Here and there, in cold pockets  
 Of remembrance, whispers out of time.

(*SP*, p. 83)

This remembrance of things past takes shape as a literal re-membering of the dis-membered or fallen-off parts of the whole, and it offers the possibility of hearing once more the "whispers out of time" that lead back to the realm of self-authenticating voice, that lead back to the erotic specificity of the painting with its "lips moistened as though about to part / Releasing speech" (*SP*, p. 82). For the "Self-Portrait" parades its secret in this inescapable eroticism through which the "hole" (*SP*, p. 73) or the absence or "what should be the vacuum of a dream / Becomes continually replete" (*SP*, p. 73).

The fetishism that particularizes the hand specifies the phallic nature of that eroticism. It evokes the hand as a token of mastery or control and confers upon it the power to "weave the delicate meshes" (*SP*, p. 70) of the very text in which it is contained. Though the subversion of metaphor by metonymy is acknowledged as taking the matter of "creation / Out of our hands" (*SP*, p. 81), the imposing presence of the hand itself serves to raise the question of authority and

control in explicit relation to the phallogocentric positing of a transcendental signifier:

Whose curved hand controls,  
Francesco, the turning seasons and the thoughts  
That peel off and fly away at breathless speeds  
Like the last stubborn leaves ripped  
From wet branches?

(SP, p. 71)

This introduction of the image of the leaves—an autumnal image with a literary history that reaches back to Homer by way of Stevens and Shelley, Milton and Virgil—serves as a trope of pathos, a trope of emotional presence in the scene of loss, that identifies the transcendental signifier as the signifier of a desire for the presence of pathos, of a desire for the reassuring self-presence implicit in a subject who is capable of desire.

Because this desire manifests itself in Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" as an attempt to reassert selfhood by submitting the self to dispersal, to differentiation, one could, with David Shapiro, name as narcissism the distinctive eros that motivates the text's implicit reconstruction of this presence or identity that it explicitly disavows.<sup>21</sup> But the relationship specified by the poem is not literally one of narcissistic specularity. The poet meditates not on his own image, but on that of Parmigianino; and where Narcissus was enchanted by the apparent otherness of his reflection, Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" presents the situation of one who finds himself

deprived  
Of a reflection, except that the whole of me  
Is seen to be supplanted by the strict  
Otherness of the painter in his  
Other room.

(SP, p. 74)

Since narcissism posits the self-enclosure of desire, the "strict otherness" that informs this éros requires that its provenance be redefined to some degree.

An insight into its precise nature may be found in a passage from *Three Poems* in which Ashbery prefigures the attractive force exerted by the self-portrait in Parmigianino's convex mirror:

Not an atom but did not feel itself obscurely compelled to set out  
in search of a mate, that didn't ache to join in the universal  
turmoil and hullabaloo that fell over the earth, roiling the clear  
waters of the reflective intellect. . . . The individual will . . . sallies  
forth full of ardor and *hubris*, bent on self-discovery in the guise

of an attractive partner who is *the heaven-sent one*, the convex one with whom he has had the urge to mate all these seasons without realizing it. Thus a state of positively sinful disquiet began to prevail wherein men's eyes could be averted from the truth by the passing of a romantic stranger whose perfume set in motion all kinds of idle and frivolous trains of thought leading who knows where—to hell, most likely, or at very best to a position of blankness and ill-conceived repose on the edge of the flood, so that looking down into it one no longer saw the comforting reflection of one's own face and felt secure in the knowledge that, whatever the outcome, the struggle was going on in the arena of one's own breast. (TP, p. 57)

This "self-discovery in the guise" of a "convex" partner is actualized in the "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" where it defines an eros that insists not only on the otherness of the self—and thus on difference within the category of the same—but also on the recuperation of selfhood by means of a relationship that is not "going on in the arena of one's own breast." Renouncing the "enchantment of self with self" (SP, p. 72), the poem suggests an eroticism informing its relationship with the image of Parmigianino, which is evoked, in Vasari's words, as "rather angel than man" (SP, p. 73), and seen with loving attention to the "gloss on the fine freckled skin" and the "lips moistened as though about to part" (SP, p. 82). Whether or not the text evokes a desire "to mate" with this "attractive partner . . . the convex one," the eroticism that characterizes its obsessive fascination with the painting's face ("As I start to forget it / It presents its stereotype again" [SP, p. 73], "A breeze like the turning of a page / Brings back your face" [SP, p. 76]), and the "tenderness" (SP, p. 69) of its gaze inflects narcissism in the direction of a homosexuality, where homosexuality has the force of a desire that is deconstructive and phallocentric at once.

It is deconstructive insofar as it questions the inevitability and absolutism of the pairing of male and female by exposing the element of sexual difference that can supply the basis for erotic desire within either category alone. It defines within the realm of sexuality an area of difference and dispersal wherein the heterosexual model of "productive" insemination is displaced by a "non-productive" or playful dissemination. Thus Roland Barthes offers a vision of "*homosexualities*" whose plural will baffle any constituted, centralized discourse" and thereby refute the singularity and self-identity that phallogentrism affirms.<sup>22</sup> But if this homosexual desire bespeaks the text's recognition of its own intrinsic difference or otherness, it is nevertheless expended in an effort of "self-discovery" that remains firmly within the

phallocentric economy of presence and accessibility to truth. The deconstructive thematics of Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" contains within it, then, this restitution of an erotic presence and this reappropriation of a phallic identity predicated upon self-knowledge. By thematizing its own deconstruction, of course, the poem makes the possibility of any "knowledge" problematic; it recognizes that as the painting's eyes "know nothing" (*SP*, p. 71), so the artist himself "doesn't know" (*SP*, p. 72) what things are possible to him. Indeed, when he looks in the mirror of his own aesthetic artifact he discovers that "a ship / Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor" (*SP*, p. 81). But if the text underscores the difficulties of knowledge, it also eroticizes knowledge—and a demystified self-knowledge in particular—as an object of desire. In this way it apprehends the eroticism that attends upon deconstruction itself as an activity of cognition. It points, that is, toward the interference of a sexual thematics with any critical enterprise directed toward discovery or interpretive sophistication.

In the process it exposes the desire, the will to power, at work—as Derrida perceives—within the machinery of deconstruction. Gayatri Spivak puts it clearly when she writes: "Derrida acknowledges that the desire of deconstruction may itself become a desire to reappropriate the text actively through mastery, to show the text what it 'does not know.'"<sup>23</sup> On a cognitive level, then, Ashbery's poem elaborates just such a deconstruction of deconstructive cognition by unfolding its implication in a system of desire. But where Derrida deconstructs deconstruction by seeing desire itself as "a deconstructive and grammatological structure,"<sup>24</sup> where his enterprise recognizes the impossibility of all knowledge and thus the participation of every critical reading in the endlessly elaborated play of textuality, Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" concludes with a diminished, but still nostalgic claim for the possibility of apprehending—however infrequently—a lost plenitude or essence:

The hand holds no chalk  
 And each part of the whole falls off  
 And cannot know it knew, except  
 Here and there, in cold pockets  
 Of remembrance, whispers out of time.

(*SP*, p. 83)

In conjuring these "whispers out of time," the text manifests its own desire to escape the contingency of the "growing up of days / Around a life" (*SP*, p. 76), a contingency evoked more explicitly in *Three Poems* where the poet asserts: "there is something to be said for these

## ASHBERY'S "SELF-PORTRAIT"

shiftless days, each distilling its drop of poison until the cup is full; there is something to be said for them because there is no escaping them" (*TP*, p. 67). Such escape *does* become possible, however, through what the "Self-Portrait" calls "whispers out of time" and *Three Poems* describes as "words that were not words but sounds out of time" that act "like a marvelous antidote to the cup that the next moment had already prepared and which, whether hemlock or nectar, could only have proved fatal because it *was* the next . . ." (*TP*, p. 76). The desire expressed by the appeal to these "whispers out of time," then, is not a Derridean recognition of desire itself as differential, but an expression of the "will to endure" that the text was "hoping to keep hidden" (*SP*, p. 79)—a willfulness that prompts the final violence with which the text dismisses Parmigianino's portrait: "There is room for one bullet in the chamber" (*SP*, p. 82). Ashbery's poem knows that "the principle of each individual thing is / Hostile to, exists at the expense of all the others" (*SP*, p. 80) and therefore its own potent "will to endure" constitutes a desire to secure its own identity and authenticity by finding itself in the place of its antecedent and reappropriating itself through the other.

As mentioned earlier, however, Parmigianino here figures Stevens as Ashbery's antecedent. The displacement of Parmigianino, therefore, must involve in some way a displacement of Stevens that is accomplished by means of the erotic energy directed here toward the recovery of the self. To sketch briefly the nature of this substitutive movement, we may note that Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" reads Stevens reductively as a poet of absence—as the "shearsman" (I, 2), the agent of undoing, in "The Man with the Blue Guitar." It thus associates Stevens with the emptying out of presence, with the inability to achieve convexity that Stevens himself suggests in the second canto of that poem:

I cannot bring a world quite round  
Although I patch it as I can.

I sing a hero's head, large eye  
And bearded bronze, but not a man.

(II, 1–4)

As Ashbery's antecedent, then, Stevens guides the later poet in the overtly theoretical articulation of his deconstructive polemic. Unable to make present the convexity or the roundness of a world, Stevens, in this reading, is used to signify the problematic nature of any mirroring or representation; and it is against this problematization that the poem rails in an outburst that challenges its own thematic preoccupation:

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those assholes

Who would confuse everything with their mirror games  
 Which seem to multiply stakes and possibilities, or  
 At least confuse issues by means of an investing  
 Aura that would corrode the architecture  
 Of the whole in a haze of suppressed mockery  
 Are beside the point. They are out of the game,  
 Which doesn't exist until they are out of it.

(SP, pp. 79-80)

In this diatribe against the emptiness of an endless deconstructive *mise en abyme*, the poem rejects the purely cognitive abstraction associated with Stevens and with Stevens' assertion that "poetry is the subject of the poem" (XXII, 1). Eros, for Ashbery, becomes the subject of the poem: the eros that informs poetry and cognition both, and that determines the evocation of Parmigianino's painted eyes:

there is in that gaze a combination  
 Of tenderness, amusement and regret, so powerful  
 In its restraint that one cannot look for long.

(SP, p. 69)

But if one does look just a little bit longer, one can see that those eyes belong properly neither to Ashbery, nor to Parmigianino, nor even to Wallace Stevens. The beautiful and pathos-laden description of the portrait, with its curving arm and its gaze combining tenderness and amusement, leads back not to Stevens and his "hero's head," but to Stevens' antecedent: to Whitman and the following passage from "Song of Myself":

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,  
 Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,  
 Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable rest,  
 Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,  
 Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

(75-79)

If Ashbery's "Self-Portrait" reads Stevens as a poet of absence, then it views Whitman as a poet of plenitude; if it apprehends Stevens as a "shearsman," an abstracted professor of philosophy's deconstruction, it sees Whitman as a manifest presence, a passionate professor of desire. Ashbery's own poetic strategy crosses Stevens with Whitman, cognition with desire; and by doing so it is able to propose a theoretical discourse on eros and presence that illuminates the presence of eros in the discourse of any theorizing. In this way the "Self-Portrait" manages to achieve the highest degree of interpretive subtlety without giving itself

over to "mirror games" or being reduced to what Stevens called "the idle accomplishment of an extremist in an exercise."

Ashbery's text is thus positioned to expose the pathos of its skepticism, the poignancy of the desire that always informs its irony; for that irony serves a strategic function in support of the text's "will to endure," its desire to escape the pervasiveness of temporal contingency. Such a strategy distinguishes the author of the "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" from the constructors of "mirror games," which is to say from the deconstructors for whom no nostalgia for lost wholeness and integrity is at stake as they "corrode the architecture / Of the whole in a haze of suppressed mockery" (*SP*, pp. 79–80). In Ashbery's words, "they are out of the game" (*SP*, p. 80), while he positions himself, in Whitman's words, "both in and out of the game." His text, then, effectively shores up its identity by thematizing its deconstruction; it reappropriates the knowledge and integrity of its selfhood by acceding to the dispersal of the self "like a wave breaking on a rock, giving up / Its shape in a gesture that expresses that shape" (*SP*, p. 73). Precisely positioned to advertise the pathos of its inevitable position within a differential system of language, so that "longing to be free, outside . . . it must stay / Posing in this place" (*SP*, p. 69), the "Self-Portrait" suggests finally that only by adopting this pose of self-exposure can it assert its integrity and claim that paradoxical property: its authentic posture.

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Crase, "The Prophetic Ashbery," *Beyond Amazement: New Essays on John Ashbery*, ed. David Lehman (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Ashbery himself has said of his work: "As has been pointed out by Richard Howard, among others, my poems are frequently commenting on themselves as they're getting written." ("Craft Interview with John Ashbery," *The Craft of Poetry: Interviews from the New York Quarterly*, ed. William Packard [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974], p. 121). This essay will suggest that such an assertion ought not to be accepted unquestioningly. Instead it should be investigated as thoroughly as an author's more conventional thematic readings of his own work.

<sup>3</sup> John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 68. The poem will hereafter be abbreviated as *SP* and all further page references will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Ashbery writes: "It seems to me that the title is something that tips the whole poem in one direction or another . . ." ("Craft Interview," p. 111).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *Éperons, Les Styles de Nietzsche*, trans. Barbara Harlow

(Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 60. The French "phallogocentrisme" is mistranslated as phallocentrism on the facing page.

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 287.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 172.

<sup>9</sup> Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Harold Bloom, et. al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Lynn Keller has written on Ashbery's relationship to Stevens in "Thinkers without Final Thought: John Ashbery's Evolving Debt to Wallace Stevens," *ELH*, 49 (Spring 1982), 235–61. She does not, however, trace Ashbery's career as far as "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," nor does she discuss the importance to Ashbery of "The Man with the Blue Guitar."

<sup>11</sup> See Bloom, "The Breaking of Form," p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> David Kalstone observes that "all questions of scientific reflection capturing a real presence, turn instantly into other kinds of reflection: changeable, even fickle thought," *Five Temperaments: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> See Kenneth Burke's discussion of metaphor in "Four Master Tropes," *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), pp. 503–17.

<sup>14</sup> David Shapiro, *John Ashbery: An Introduction to the Poetry* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1979), p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Stamelman, "Critical Reflections: Poetry and Art Criticism in Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,'" *New Literary History*, 15 (Spring 1984), p. 611.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, *Éperons, Les Styles de Nietzsche*, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Stamelman, "Critical Reflections," p. 613.

<sup>18</sup> John Ashbery, *Three Poems* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 57. This book will hereafter be abbreviated as *TP* and citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), XXI, 152–57.

<sup>20</sup> Though his essay differs greatly from mine in what it sees as the causes and consequences of this bifurcated desire, Charles Altieri persuasively locates a similar conflict at work in the text. It is, he writes, "as if the speaker's mental hand were divided between the desire to identify and a desire to break out of the balloon of his own endlessly circling monologue." "Motives in Metaphor: John Ashbery and the Modernist Long Poem," *Genre*, XI, No. 4, p. 683.

<sup>21</sup> Shapiro, *John Ashbery*, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, 1977), p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Gayatri Spivak, "Translator's Preface," *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. lxxvii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. lxxviii.

# The Shaping of Jacob's Room: Woolf's Manuscript Revisions

E. L. BISHOP

Virginia Woolf had been turning over the ideas for "a new form for a new novel" since January when she sat down on a rainy April morning in 1920 to sketch out a plan for her new work:

Reflections upon beginning a work of fiction to be called, perhaps, Jacobs Room: Thursday, April 15th 1920.

---

I think the main point is that it should be free.

Yet what about form?

Let us suppose that the Room will hold it together.

Intensity of life compared with immobility.

Experiences.

To change style at will.<sup>1</sup>

This preliminary note is now well known—Charles Hoffmann quoted it in his 1969 article on the drafts of Woolf's early novels—and it seems to indicate that the focus and the structuring principles were clear in her mind from the outset. Indeed, Hoffmann states, "As evident in her preliminary notes for *Jacob's Room*, Virginia Woolf intended from the beginning to use Jacob's room as the central focus of the novel to 'hold it together' and give it form," and he devotes his attention to Woolf's handling of the stream of consciousness technique.<sup>2</sup> But Woolf's intentions were not at all as certain as he suggests: she will "perhaps" call the book "Jacob's Room"; she "supposes" that the room will hold it together. Alex Zwerdling, in his perceptive study of technique and tone in the novel, disposes of the idea that *Jacob's Room* was written for the sake of technical innovation—as David Daiches has suggested<sup>3</sup>—and, citing Woolf's introduction to the Modern Library edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, he asserts that it is evident she "begins with a subject rather

than with a method; and that the subject seems to have a will of its own rather than allowing the novelist to shape it according to a preconceived theory of narration or a pre-existing form."<sup>4</sup> Yet this assumes that the subject at least is well defined, and whether one takes the book to be about a particular young man named Jacob (who resembles Thoby Stephen), or the generation lost in the war (epitomized by a figure who resembles Rupert Brooke), or about the relationship between the narrator and her subject, or about the process of perception and the nature of being, or all of this and more, one finds in the manuscript something much more tentative than Zwerdling implies. The draft records a gradual and often very groping process of discovery as both the subject matter and the form evolve together.<sup>5</sup>

What strikes one first about the manuscript draft is that Woolf is using *rooms* as an index of characters; Jacob's is not at first singled out. In fact the lyrical passage that introduces Jacob's room at Cambridge, "The feathery white moon never let the sky grow dark . . ." (I, 36) appears again at the opening of a section which deals with a young woman in her room at Newnham College. Angela Edwards, alone in her room, admires herself in the mirror and flits about excitedly, dreaming of her invitation to Bamborough Castle: "here was light at the end of the tunnel—life, the world" (I, 91). The contrasts with Jacob are pointed: her interests lie outside the college—for her, "Life" is the social world—whereas for Jacob the essence of life lies in "the spirit of the Greeks," and he will preserve his university ideals when he moves into the world. Further, in Angela's room there is a double image of the character and the suggestion that not only is she self-regarding (as Jacob never is) but that she can be known: "A double light one might figure in Angela's room seeing how bright she was, & how bright came back the reflection of herself from the square glass. The whole of her was perfectly delineated: perhaps the soul" (I, 87). Jacob's room is filled with clues to his character—books and pictures and his essay in progress on the table—but he himself is absent and he remains elusive. Woolf later deleted the vignette of female university life, and published it separately as "A Woman's College from Outside" published in *Atlanta's Garland* in 1926.<sup>6</sup> Its appearance in the first draft of *Jacob's Room*, however, suggests that her statement, "Let us suppose that the Room will hold it together," was not a clear resolve but in fact a supposition, one which only gradually came to be realized. The fact that Woolf used the introductory passage, "The feathery white moon never let the sky grow dark . . ." to place the two rooms in such obvious apposition indicates that her intention was not at first to make Jacob her exclusive

concern, and that she was going to reveal him by the more expansive techniques of reflection and contrast that she had used in her two previous novels.

The next chapter in the manuscript focuses on Mrs. Pascoe, the Cornish peasant woman, and again rooms seem to offer a partial solution to the problem of knowing another:

For the millionth time she looks at the sea. Probably this last look confirms or alters something always growing in her. It is part of the rinsings, scourings, copulations, births, & deep glooms & scoldings, which have gone on perhaps for sixty years in the four rooms of the cottage. But nobody knows. (I, 97)

Her character may be reflected in her face: as in the final text we are told that "Her face was assuredly not soft, sensual, or lecherous; but hard, wise, wholesome rather, signifying in a room full of people the flesh and blood of life" (*JR*, p. 52). But in the manuscript, instead of standing in the doorway scouring her pan (as in the published text), Mrs. Pascoe makes tea and drinks it in the kitchen, and the heavily canceled description of the atmosphere of the room creates an impression utterly different from the wholesomeness implied by her face:

She drank deeply & comfortably, cut herself a piece of bread, spread the butter thick, & in doing so [revealed] showed hands knobbed with labour & grimed with dirt. [The perhaps] owing (perhaps) to the heat (small size) of the room, & the rich musty smell of the geraniums in the window, the presence of Mrs. Pascoe the body became very [important] (emphatic). [Two bodies would] She wore a dusty white cloth of some kind round her neck, & the creases in her skin were marked by black grains. [When her husband came in, the two bodies] together would [create an intolerable sense of be] make it impossible to think of anything except the body. One might go into the skulldug, the other stumble up the stairs to the bedroom; but [in this four roomed cottage as] there would be no escaping the body. [Its functions are detestable.] An earth closet out in the rain—sickness—a woman's period—upst copulation upstairs in the double bed, [or here before the fire perhaps]—(childbirth) [the] birth—all all that veils & places in the shadows the natural functions of the body are all bodies] as the room filled with bodies. [These functions & desires would assert themselves. all these functions & desires would press become prominent,] it would be impossible not to think solely of these functions & desires. [& Whether The small room is altogether filled with the body.] Yet the room was scrupulously clean. Her face [showed not] was assuredly not soft, sensual, or lecherous; but hard, wise, wholesome rather, signifying in a room full of sophisticated people the flesh & blood of life. . . . (I, 99–101)

"Yet the room was scrupulously clean": in this set of rooms Woolf emphasizes the disjunction between antiseptic exteriors and the animal functions of the body. Woolf is, among other things, exploring the interpenetration of psychic and physical space, and one can perhaps see a pattern emerging—Jacob's room contains hints of his intellectual self, Angela's room reflects a social self, Mrs. Pascoe's room captures the physical self, and each has implications for what constitutes life and being. The significance of the rooms left out of *Jacob's Room* deserves a short study of its own, but here I want merely to suggest that the appearance of three prominent rooms in the first fifty pages of manuscript (and three months of writing) indicates that initially Woolf intended to structure her novel around the rooms of several characters, not Jacob's alone.

However, from this point on in the manuscript there are no rooms with the same significance as Angela's and Mrs. Pascoe's, as if Woolf saw that she would lose the suggestiveness of Jacob's room by surrounding it with others. And in the published text, though Mrs. Pascoe retains her secret longings for gentility, the one room that is mentioned is the little parlor that preserves her treasures. It is clear why Woolf cut the passage: the discrepancy between wholesome appearance and the unmentioned functions and desires of the body can be used to greater effect if it is associated with Jacob, not simply with peasants, and thus it is reserved for the scene between Jacob and the prostitute Laurette, in which the nature of their relationship, "the whole bag of ordure," is covered by polite conversation (*JR*, pp. 103–04). The deletion is part of a comprehensive pattern of post-draft revisions that sharpen the focus on Jacob. For example, Woolf cuts a passage in which Nick Bramham, the painter who is jilted by Fanny Elmer for Jacob, reaches a profound and lyrical despair. In the published version Woolf describes Nick and Fanny as "impetuous spirits" who, "believing implicitly in the truth of the moment, fling off, sting the cheek, are gone like sharp hail" (*JR*, p. 120). There is a space break and then the short passage in which Fanny bursts into the studio saying, "'I'm afraid I'm late'" (she has been "hanging about" Jacob's neighborhood in the hope of seeing him). At this, Nick said nothing and Fanny grew defiant. "'I'll never come again!' she cried at length. 'Don't, then,' Nick replied, and off she ran without so much as good-night" (*JR*, p. 120). The scene is brief, to the point—Fanny leaves Nick for Jacob. In the manuscript, however, Nick is not the stoic who ends the relationship with a curt "'Don't, then.'" He becomes (by implication, for the passage is narrated) one of those like Peter Walsh, with his dream of the solitary traveler, for whom death is

a temptation as well as a last resort (here, and in most of the subsequent quotations, I omit cancellations):

Nick, perhaps, or Fanny Elmer ludicrously supporting that this is the worst, the last, the end; leap, snatch knives, take drugs, or, prevented, drift like wreckage across the track. {Riding the crest} fling off, {sting the cheek on a with sharp hail} are seen no more, & Perhaps-perhaps. For life, this dark eyed mother, with all her violence, spurning us, bidding us fly, vanish, never learn to grow old, yet often press {close}—to her murmurs; some secret. What? Only one word. Listen. Another. No sense to it. No. But lean closer. Follow after down the great hall, dimly lit with the curved ceiling, Resonant with echoes; alarming, tapers blown out; cold gusts from what sea? Life, life, booming: & the lightning; I say, how vast it is! How musical! She draws us on.

There he sat with his hands on his knees while the tears ran down his cheeks. "Oh, said" Fanny, bounding into the room. They hated each other. All that evening they quarrelled. "I shall never come again" she said. (II, 105-07)

But Nick perhaps, or Fanny Elmer, believing implicitly in the truth of the moment, fling off, sting the cheek, are gone like sharp hail. (JR, p. 120)

"Oh," said Fanny, bursting into studio three-quarters of an hour late. . . .

"I'll never come again." she cried at length. "Don't, then," Nick replied, and off she ran without so much as good-night. (JR, p.120)

The scene, however, had to go, for it lends disproportionate stature to Nick, and such reflections on "life, this dark eyed mother" could hardly be imputed to the bluff, no-nonsense Jacob. Woolf's problem throughout seems to be that although her subject is Jacob she is continually sidetracked by other characters and, like the passenger on the train in "An Unwritten Novel," starts making up stories about them. In fact, the fat Italian Jacob meets on the train in Italy is, in the manuscript, Guiseppe Bandelli, a horse dealer with a whole history of his own.

Her stories about minor characters also reveal her giving way to impulses that she curbed in revising the book. Mrs. Plumer, the working-class wife of the don who invites Jacob and some other undergraduates to lunch, is, in the manuscript, judged harshly: "Creditable though her action was . . . it is impossible to acquit her—No, no, no, Mrs. Plumer was not a nice woman" (I, 51). In the published novel Woolf seems more tolerant of the grasping impulses which follow inevitably from her background. And the description of Pascoe's cottage quoted above reveals (particularly if one reads through rather than skips over the cancellations) a revulsion uncalled for by artistic necessity. Though such outbursts are rare, later when she comes to describe the old women eating lunch, whom she contrasts with the "impetuous spirits," Nick and Fanny, Woolf has in her final text this touch of the grotesque: "Damp cubes of pastry fell into mouths opened like triangular bags" (JR, p. 119). The manuscript, however, reveals a stronger distaste:

Their own eggs on toast were  
(at last) delivered & (satisfaction possessed them.) their  
eyes wandered no more.

But oh, when stout suburban women satisfy nature's needs how unnecessary it appears! So equably could we let that force [be extinguished. die.] be quenched. [The mouth however is opened wide & damp clods of pastry des And] No fire can come from damp clods of pastry. It is [prettier] (better) far to see lions with bloody

Their own eggs on toast were at last delivered. Their eyes strayed no more. Damp cubes of pastry fell into mouths opened like triangular bags. (JR, pp. 118-19)

bones in their paws than these  
cheap lunching women.  
(II:95–97)

The revised version preserves the repulsiveness but renders it abstractly: "clods" have become "cubes" and the mouths, no longer bestial, have become "triangular bags." Where the manuscript heaps epithets on the women the final text transforms them; the overt outrage is filtered through a cool but remorseless cubism.

Another passage that was excised is this brief exchange between Jacob and Florinda when they first meet:

Oh Jacob, said the girl as they pounded up the hill in the dark, 'I'm so frightfully unhappy!' You're not a Jew, are you? she said. "I do hate Jews".... {Oh Jacob your Christian name is it—} And she told him how a Jew had played her a dirty trick, leaving all his dirty clothes scattered over the room, & she having to pawn her mothers watch to pay the rent. Shouts of laughter came from the others. (I, 155)

"Oh Jacob," said the girl as they pounded up the hill in the dark, "I'm so frightfully unhappy!"

Shouts of laughter came from the others—high, low; some before, others after. (JR, p. 73)

The revised version omits the reference to Jews and leaves us with a Florinda who is more pleasantly empty-headed, repeating, "I'm so frightfully unhappy," for no specific reason.

I spoke of Woolf curbing certain impulses in revising these passages, and it might be tempting to identify them as simply contempt for Jews, peasants, and the working class, or distaste for things of the body. Those sentiments are there, certainly, but I believe there is something more complex at work. In a discussion of the revisions to *To the Lighthouse* Susan Dick notes how in the manuscript Lily's commitment to art is more aggressive than in the published text:<sup>7</sup> "There is something better than helping dying women. Something, heaven be praised, beyond human relations altogether.... Pictures are more important than people—it had a dreadful sound to it"; and she is much harsher in

her thoughts on marriage: "Why did they believe in their sepulchral union—in locking people up in the catacombs and turning the key on them forever...."<sup>8</sup>

Woolf never approaches a subject with reserve, though she may temper in revision. In the letters and diaries she spins off poison-pen sketches of her friends and associates in passages that are more stylistic tours de force than portraits. She is fired as much by the phrase as by the impression. In the essays she explores an issue by first arguing vigorously and without qualification on one side of the argument, then abruptly switching back to present, equally wholeheartedly, the other side. This is a deliberate rhetorical gambit, but one consistent with her habits of mind. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the manuscripts of the novels not only are the minor characters given more background, all the attitudes expressed are apt to be blunter, the positions taken more hard-edged than in the published texts, as Woolf allows each impulse its full rein.

The fine control comes in revising. Unlike the leisurely *Voyage Out* or the voluminous *Night and Day*, *Jacob's Room* is pared close to the bone, and Woolf was, of course, working in a more elliptical mode from the outset. Yet much of the compression comes from the fact that where she described in her earlier novels, she now dramatizes—and the change occurs after the draft. Between the manuscript and the final text, she consistently reduces authorial comment and exposition, letting her scenes suggest. When the Rev. Floyd proposes to Jacob's mother she is annoyed, but the reader is left to infer the causes of her reluctance. The only reason she offers is that "she had always disliked red hair in men" (*JR*, p. 19); the manuscript is much more explicit:

"How could I think of marriage!" she thought to herself almost bitterly as she fastened the latch with a piece of wire. It was, probably, that the idea of copulation had now become infinitely remote from her. She did not use the word; & yet as she sat darning the boys clothes that night it annoyed her to find that it was so. "And I dislike red headed men" she said;

"How could I think of marriage!" she said to herself bitterly, as she fastened the gate with a piece of wire. She had always disliked red hair in men, she thought, thinking of Mr. Floyd's appearance, that night when the boys had gone to bed. (*JR*, p. 18)

pushing away her work basket. (I, 23)

And looking back on the incident as she strokes the cat, she thinks

how she had had him gelded, & how she did not like red headed men—both thoughts coming on top of each other & making her smile, though she had not used the word gelded or—indeed she never used words when she thought indecent thoughts. Smiling she went into the kitchen; Jacob smiled. (I, 27)

how she had had him gelded, and how she did not like red hair in men. Smiling she went into the kitchen. (JR, p. 20)

In the novel Woolf lets the coordinate structure make the connection for us, instead of telling us Betty doesn't put thoughts into words, she dramatizes the mental evasion.

In the scenes dealing with Jacob's infatuation with Clara, and later with Sandra, Woolf again revises so that the crosscurrents of emotion are only hinted at, and in doing so she substantially alters the effect of the scene. In this first passage Jacob is saying goodbye to Clara:

"Oh." he said, taking the basket of grapes; but she walked past him towards the door of the greenhouse. The children were whirling past the door throwing things into the air.

"Little demons!" she cried.

"I haven't said it" Jacob thought to himself. "I want to say it. I can't say it. Clara! Clara!"

"They're throwing the onions," said Jacob."

(I, 123)

"Oh, Miss Durrant," he said, taking the basket of grapes; but she walked past him towards the door of the greenhouse.

"You're too good—too good," she thought, thinking of Jacob, thinking that he must not say that he loved her. No, no, no.

The children were whirling past the door, throwing things high into the air.

"Little demons!" she cried. "What have they got?" she asked Jacob.

"Onions, I think," said Jacob. He looked at them without moving. (JR, p. 61)

In the manuscript Woolf's first thought was to have Jacob struggle to declare his love, crying the name of the beloved silently, as Terence cries aloud in *The Voyage Out*. But the cries from "Rachel! Rachel!" to "O Death!" remain exclusively elegiac in Woolf's novels, and here she may have felt them inappropriate. In any case, the lines take us into Jacob, stating his emotions, where her concern in revising is to engage us in the narrator's act of inferring them.<sup>9</sup> In the final version the tension is rendered by movement: while Clara keeps moving in order to forestall an intimate moment, he stays rooted to the spot, his strangled emotions evoked by his immobility. The use of tableau is itself significant, and I will return to it later in the essay, but I want first to consider the climactic scene in which Jacob and Sandra experience a moment of intense but ineffable meaning on the Acropolis (II, 251–69; *JR*, pp. 157–60).

The episode is written out twice, and worked over extensively, as Woolf attempts to capture the tension between Jacob and Sandra, and to describe the evanescent and eternal "thing"—a term she often uses, implying both an emotion and a concrete object—that is created in a moment of communion. The first version of the opening conversation (cf. *JR*, p. 157) has Jacob uneasily accepting the proposal to go with Sandra to the Acropolis without her husband. I have normalized the punctuation:

"Yes," said Jacob, twisting his stick in his hands. "I dare say it would be all right."

And again Sandra's nostrils opened slightly.

"You mistrust me!" she cried.

"No, no of course I don't," he replied hastily. . . .

"I can't say what I feel". . . . (II, 253)

The second version is close to the final text, opening with, "Evan is happier alone" (II, 55; *JR*, p. 157), and omitting any suggestion that Jacob feels the impropriety of the situation. Nevertheless, when Sandra wonders what she wants from Jacob, Woolf again feels the need to explain:

"We are very happy, Evan & I."

"Then what," she asked herself, "can this man give me?—It is something that I have missed."

[Her mind was not mean. She was had indeed forgotten herself; she was she had] & yet she was not egotistical; nor vapid; at the moment; but exalted & without self-consciousness. Nor was she a silly woman, nor a cruel one. That she told lies was true, but only with her mind, which was unstable; & sometimes she was extraordinarily sincere, & would show great insight into her husbands character. (II, 259)

## THE SHAPING OF JACOB'S ROOM

And again, when they reach the Acropolis, Woolf tries to render their hesitancy and their desire for what she would elsewhere call a "moment of being":

Reality of some sort she meant; & felt (in the soft dark [how strong its] strength, [passion;] its fearful (rough) excitement.)

[They had no wish for to] To kiss him—[would have been enough: she had no wish beyond it.] She might have wanted that—[but scarcely more.]

[“There’s the Parthenon right enough” he said.]  
No—not that.

To kiss her?—no not that.

What then?

Presumably they both wished for one thing—[to be not for this the] the certainty [that something Certainty not of] That something survives, still means, yes even in the chasms of dark years. The thing we [saw] felt. (II, 267)

The next day Woolf revises, working over this sense of what they wanted:

[Presumably what they wanted was that something should happen so definitely that there it would always be] They wanted certainty; they wanted that the thin shell dividing them should break. Once united, something even in the waste of chaos, survives. (II, 269)

Finally, after the description of the wind coursing over Albania and Turkey, the scene ends with, “Sandra’s veils were swirled about her head” and the deleted line “She kissed him” (II, 271). Woolf returned to the scene the following day, to add the exchange of the book of poems and to continue with the description of the wind. The description ends without mentioning Betty Flanders and Woolf does not return to Jacob and Sandra; she ends volume two of the manuscript here and she does not go back to the episode in volume three.

We can see that even at this late stage, and after extensive rewriting in the draft, Woolf still seemed to be thinking in terms of some sort of consummation (the kiss), and still seemed to be trying to specify that elusive “thing” that Sandra and Jacob are hoping to discover and create. Between the draft and the final version Woolf cut significantly. Jacob does not attempt to express his emotions, Sandra’s motives are not analyzed, and it is the wind itself that carries the emotion: as the tension between Sandra and Jacob increases the narrator moves further and further out, and the single line “Sandra’s veils were swirled about her” (JR, p. 159) carries the intensity of the moment. The changes also eliminate the earnestness of the manuscript scene. In the published text

there is no talk of their agonizing over whether or not to kiss, and the narrator is almost sardonic, observing offhandedly, "There was the Acropolis; but had they reached it? The columns and the Temple remain; the emotion of the living breaks fresh on them year after year; and of that what remains?" There is no attempt to specify what it is they may have achieved: "As for reaching the Acropolis who shall say that we ever do it, or that when Jacob woke next morning he found anything hard and durable to keep for ever? Still, he went with them to Constantinople" (*JR*, p. 160). The reader is left to supply the reality of the moment from his own experience—and cautioned that such moments may not really exist at all: "who shall say that we ever do it . . .?"

The versions of the scene show Woolf striving for greater suggestiveness, trying by indirection to capture something beyond language, teasing the reader toward the ineffable. But further, the initial inclusion of Jacob's attempts to express himself reveal that after writing almost 250 pages of manuscript Woolf had still not firmly settled on the means for presenting her central character. It is only after the first draft that Jacob becomes a figure seen primarily from the outside, whose thoughts and emotions remain a matter of speculation. Though in the novel Sandra continues to question, "What for? What for?" the narrator conjectures that "Jacob never asked himself any such questions, to judge by the way he laced his boots; shaved himself; to judge by the depth of his sleep that night . . ." (*JR*, p. 161), and it is a supposition made on the basis of external observation. Jacob does not reveal himself. Significantly, the manuscript opens with Jacob lost and crying "Nanny! Nanny!": Archer's searching cry, "Ja-cob! Ja-cob!" that goes "out into the world, solitary, unanswered" (*JR*, p. 7), was added in a subsequent draft. This is consistent with the manuscript version as a whole, which is an account of Jacob trying to find himself, rather than as the novel became, an attempt by another to know Jacob. Throughout the draft, despite disclaimers, Woolf plainly retains a confidence that she can render Jacob's inner life. The drama of the narrator's search, which dominates the final text, is here less urgent.<sup>10</sup>

The book is, as readers have been quick to observe, concerned in part with questions of knowing, particularly with the difficulty of knowing another human being.<sup>11</sup> In the published text these questions are tied to Jacob; they rise out of the narrator's love for him, her attempt to know him. In the manuscript, however, they appear in connection with other characters, even minor figures such as Mrs. Pascoe, of whom the narrator muses, "Yes, it is easier to follow the flight of the bee, or note the colour of the waves, than to conjecture

the thought in her brain, or the light in her eyes, or what it is that remains constant behind everything" (I, 97). Woolf deleted this and similar expressions of uncertainty related to other characters so that the problem of knowing Jacob becomes the paradigm for all such knowing.

Further, Woolf altered the quality of the narrator's comments. What distinguishes the published novel is the fact that it is not only an attempt to know Jacob, it is the narrator's own quest, an intimate relationship which we are privileged to share. Yet originally the narrator was much more collusive, always conscious of her audience. "But you know how anyone reads who's worth anything, just what he likes" (I, 61–63), she says in the manuscript, where in the text she simply asserts, "Any one who's worth anything reads just what he likes" (*JR*, p. 37). Later when she says, "And then consider the effect of sex" (*JR*, p. 71), in the manuscript she turns to the audience with "And here let everybody use the pen for himself or herself . . ." (I, 151). The invitation was deleted, along with numerous other phrases in which she addresses the reader directly. In the final version the reader is acknowledged indirectly, through the imperative mood, and the relation between the narrator and Jacob becomes a private one.

However, in one instance Woolf moved in the opposite direction, shifting a whole section (although not one in which she speaks about Jacob) from the first person to the second person. In the passage in which she tells of the "chasms in the continuity of our ways" (*JR*, p. 95), and offers a glimpse of the possibilities yawning on every side of our well-ordered lives, Woolf unrelentingly implicates the reader: "What are you going to meet if you turn this corner?" she asks, ". . . where are you going? . . . you behold on the skyline the Azores . . . you sit on the verge of the marsh . . . you have committed a crime. . . ."

If one reads the passage in its entirety in the novel (see *JR*, pp. 94–95) and then encounters the same passage in the manuscript, what strikes one immediately is how similar they are, but how much less forceful the first version is. The difference derives from the fact that the episode was originally cast in the first person:

The streets of London have their map, but our passions are uncharted. What am I going to meet if I turn this corner? "Holborn is straight ahead of you" says the policeman. Ah, but where am I going, if instead of brushing past the old man with the white beard & the silver medal I let him go on with his story,—which, ends in an invitation to step somewhere—to his room presumably off Queen Square, & there he shows me a collection of birds eggs, & this (skipping the intermediate stages) brings me one winters day to the Essex coast, where the little

boat makes off to the ship; & the ship sails, & I behold, on the skyline, the Azores; & the flamingoes rise, & there I sit on the verge of the marsh drinking punch, outcast from civilisation, infected with yellow fever as likely as not, & the witness of unnameable vices in the brothels of California. And that is a sketch—a cloud. No one can foretell the truth. As frequent as street corners in Holborn are these chasms in the continuity of life. (II, 19–21)

Here the experience is the narrator's and we may choose whether or not to identify with it, whereas in the revised version the strange potentialities of life are forced on us ("you let him go on with his story . . ."). Woolf clearly wanted this notion of chasms to be imperative, and in translating it from the first person to the second person she changes it from one person's impression of things to a forceful statement about the nature of existence. Further, in the manuscript the suggestiveness of the line, "an outcast from civilisation because you have committed a crime . . ." is denied by the specificity (and passivity) of ". . . the witness of unnameable vices in the brothels of California." Then the scene stops. "And that is a sketch—a cloud," Woolf concludes, and offers the leaden truism, "No one can foretell the truth."

In revising she sustains the momentum of that long sentence, taking us from Holborn to the Azores, infecting us with yellow fever and sending us off into our own reverie with "and—fill in the sketch as you like." Further, in a small but telling alteration in the next line, she changes "chasms in the continuity of life" to "chasms in the continuity of our ways." She thus avoids an overworked phrase ("continuity of life"), but more important she achieves a doubleness of meaning—"ways" is both "life" in the general sense and also the patterns of our movement through the city, a meaning reinforced by the next line, added in the final version, "Yet we keep straight on." So where in the manuscript we end in reverie and abstract speculation—in "a cloud"—in the novel we return to the street. The sense of possibility is grounded in physical reality. In "Notes on an Elizabethan Play" Woolf argues that the fabulous quality of the Elizabethan writers ultimately bores us and that however high they may attempt to take us, the modern sensibility requires "one toe touching Liverpool."<sup>12</sup> In this episode and throughout her revisions we see Woolf completing the arc of her imaginative flights, returning them to the phenomenal world.

Finally, and here we return to questions of spatial form, Woolf deleted the comment in order to sharpen the scenes as discrete units, using narrative structure to impart her sense of the "chasms in our

ways."<sup>13</sup> At the finish of the episode in which Jacob and Jinny and the sculptor Cruttendon walk in the gardens at Versailles, Woolf takes them back to the train station for a sentimental parting:

The hyacinth smell; or the frilled waxy flowers; or all these new names; or Cruttendon & Jinny & himself marching up & down up & down; made Jacob feel a new kind of person: And as they were all about the same age that was what they all felt. And Cruttendon knew that he was a very great genius. And Jacob gave Jinny a bunch of violets. And they never met again.

(II, 135)

The next day she tinkers with the passage, but retains the main elements, ending as before with the narrator's summary: "Then up they got & went to the station, & Jacob bought violets from a girl & gave them to Jinny. They never met again" (II, 137). Then she rewrites the whole episode and recasts the ending, dropping the violets and the overly dramatic "They never met again," offering instead a scene which captures the awkwardness and bathos of such moments. Aside from a change in location from the Gare St. Lazare to the Gare des Invalides (with its ironic overtones), the scene is very close to the published version:

And they stood in the Gare  
St. Lazare.

With one of those queer movements which are so slight, yet so definite, which may wound, or pass unnoticed, yet generally inflict a good deal of discomfort, Jinny & Cruttendon drew together: Jacob stood apart. They had to separate. Something must be said. Nothing was said. A man wheeled a trolley past Jacobs legs so near that he almost grazed them. When Jacob recovered his balance the other two were turning away, though Jinny looked over her shoulder, & Cruttendon waved his hand.

Well, it was over. and Cruttendon, waving his hand, disappeared like the very great genius that he (II, 145) was. (*JR*, p. 129)

The laconic, "Well, it was over," still summarizes but it also dramatizes, being midway between authorial observation and indirect speech. For the published version, however, Woolf went further, deleting even that line to end with action (Cruttendon disappearing) rather than comment, leaving the moment frozen in process as she did with the scene between Jacob and Clara in the garden. The technique is similar to the cinematic device of the "freeze-frame": the action stops and after a pause a new action begins. In the novel the blank space on the page provides the moment of suspension. The technique is consistent with the action of the book as a whole, which renders not only the loss but also the disturbing lapse in continuity felt by the survivors of World War I.

In revising the conclusion Woolf again alters to achieve the effect of action suspended, broken off. She first wrote,

"What is one to do with these, Mr. Bonamy?"  
 She held out a pair of Jacob's old shoes.  
 [They both laughed.]  
 [The room waved behind her tears.] (III, 63)

The next day on a separate page she rewrote the final lines, confirming her cancellations. The waving of the external world behind Betty's tears was shifted to the beginning of the novel where it introduces the united themes of perception and mortality. Left at the end the tears would have provided a resolution of the action, shifting the focus to the mother's grief. By breaking in mid-action Woolf emphasizes the impossibility of making sense of such a death; the closing leaves the reader with the absence which swallows Bonamy's cry, "Jacob! Jacob!"

The moment of arrest emphasizes the paratactic relation between events. As Harper notes, "The transitions between elements of the narrative create discontinuity as well as continuity. The effect is always to challenge the fundamental principles that structure the text itself."<sup>14</sup> Thus although in terms of plot the novel is a *bildungsroman*, structurally it denies the implications of that form.<sup>15</sup> As Harper points out:

The real origins of human events remain mysterious throughout the book. Conventional principles of causality are challenged

from the very first sentence. "So of course there was nothing for it but to leave": this opening line, from Betty's letter to Captain Barfoot, is never subsequently explained: the first word of the book is a connective that doesn't connect.<sup>16</sup>

In the manuscript, however, the novel begins with something specific and solid: "Beyond the rock lay something shiny on the sand" (I, 3).<sup>17</sup> The tenuousness of the connections seems to have grown on her as she wrote. The space breaks on the page which emphasize the sudden shifts in action, or in emotion, were not present in the beginning. Woolf begins by designating the episodes as separate chapters, then halfway through the first volume she starts to let her chapters encompass larger units, and she divides her episodes with rows of x's. Toward the end of Volume I the first space break occurs, though she continues to use rows of x's, but by the end of Volume II, midway through the section set in Greece, she is dividing the episodes with space breaks.

If the breaks correspond to the "chasms in our ways," they also seem to be a product of that "unseizable force" that goes "hurtling through" the nets of novelists. When Woolf first attempts to describe it in the manuscript, she emphasizes its unpredictable quality:

Nothing is more baffling to the character mongers. As soon could they take the spiritual diagram of Mr. Peabody's statue at the Bank as write this man's character. Thus they boggled at what was most obvious in Jacob Flanders; as it was obvious too in Clara Durrant, her brother Timothy, Mrs. Durrant, Bonamy, Sandra Williams, and all the rest. The natural unseizable force in people. Take the quietest street in the suburbs. Select the placidest old maid. The sole tragedy & catastrophe of the week was that the robin sat upon the flower bed & broke the pink carnation. Yet in truth the same unseizable force drives her that impels the young man with a brilliant career. She, for no reason that anyone could discover, quietly blew her brains out one day on a seat in Richmond Park: & he becomes Prime Minister: the gossips can never tell us what force inspired them. Thus, unfortunately for the character dealers, life is all action even the quietest, & least eventful; & though some try to reason it out, directly the clock strikes even the philosopher has to pull on his boots, nor can his meditations much alter the flow of the unseizable force. (II, 218–19)

Here the emphasis falls on the fact that character declares itself in action, not merely revealing itself but coming to be in the event. Later in the manuscript when she revises the section, in a passage heavily canceled but nonetheless very close to the final text, Woolf

dispenses with the old woman, and the homely philosopher pulling on his boots in response to the "flow" of the force, and gives us instead the much more violent image of the force itself "hurtling" through nets, leaving them "torn to ribbons" (II, 247; *JR*, p. 155). Now the focus is on the force, not the personalities controlled by it; and now it is regarded not just as something mysterious and ineffable—it is something that rips apart the fabric of causality, and our preconceptions of character and the sources of human action.

What Woolf invites us to see, and what forced itself to the surface as a major concern of the novel, is the fact that life's connectedness is perhaps only apparent and accidental, that the most ordinary moment is fraught with a myriad possible beginnings—and also with the possibility of death. Further, if these moments are not necessarily connected then each is in a sense a death. The book is suffused with an elegiac tone, but much of what contributes to it was added after the first draft: Betty's opening letter, which taken together with her tears immediately suggests death; Archer's cry "Jacob! Jacob!" which will reverberate through the novel; the sharpened focus on Jacob's empty room, and the narrator's expressions of uncertainty about him. Even the general movement away from explicit exposition to suggestive detail enhances the sense of contingency and reduces the impression of connectedness, to a degree particularly striking after *The Voyage Out* and *Night and Day*. This movement, reflected in the narrative structure with what I have called the "freeze-frame" endings to the episodes, came to be emphasized further by the format, with the space breaks on the page.

But of course we also associate the tearing of the "unseizable force" with the action of bullets, and throughout this novel (again, with an explicitness not found in the earlier work) the phenomenological and the political are inseparable. Sara Ruddick argues for the centrality of social forces in the shaping of the novel, pointing out that although Jacob is modeled on Thoby Stephen, Jacob's death, unlike Thoby's, is not accidental: it is the "avoidable outcome of institutionalized violence."<sup>18</sup> Zwerdling concurs, arguing that the ironic detachment of Woolf's narrator grows not only out of a desire to avoid sentimentality, but out of her distaste for the institutions that shaped his career.<sup>19</sup> I agree, and certainly her political sympathies were in place before she began the novel. But they grew stronger in the writing. The ironic, sometimes cynical tone of the narrator emerges much more strongly in the published text than in the draft, and revisions such as those to the passage on the "unseizable force" sharpen the social criticism of the novel. Thus the lacunae in the text can be taken both as emblems of the

bullet holes that riddled the young men of Jacob's age, shattering comfortable notions of self and society, and, in a broader sense, as emblems of the "chasms in our ways." The phenomenological and the political themes develop together, as if her sense of the contingency of life and of the madness of war reinforced one another, both structuring the text.

Although the breaking up of the narrative on the page constitutes the most obvious departure from Woolf's previous work, it is merely the spatial adjunct to the rhetorical shaping of the scenes. And this shape developed in response to the demands of the subject, the complex nature of which was only fully discovered in the act of writing. Considering Jacob himself, Judy Little says, "It might be argued that the slender sketch of Jacob's growth is an accident or flaw in the construction of the novel, a failure on the part of an author who was trying out a new method. I don't think so."<sup>20</sup> The manuscript proves her right; we have seen that there was at first a much fuller representation of Jacob's consciousness that Woolf deliberately excised. But further, the draft reveals that she was not "trying out a new method"; she was, led by intuition rather than theory, moving toward one. She sensed that the room might "hold it together," but she did not perceive at that point precisely how it would function. The movement toward the room as an enclosing figure and the concomitant movement away from conventional closure, from "holding it together" as she had in her first two novels, were both gradual. The final shape of the work and its true intent emerged only toward the end of the first draft, as Jacob (the public, the private, and the perceived being) and his room (the domicile, the psychic space, and the text itself) progressively defined one another.

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, holograph draft, I, 1. References to both the manuscript and the published draft will be cited parenthetically in the text, the former designated by volume and page number, the latter by *JR* and page number, e.g. (I, 61; *JR*, p. 36). Words within pointed brackets ⟨word⟩ are interlinear additions or emendations. Words within braces {word} are marginal additions or emendations. Words within square brackets [word] represent cancellations by Virginia Woolf. I am grateful to Professor Quentin Bell, and to the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, for permission to quote from the manuscripts. I also wish to acknowledge the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the grant that made this research possible.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hoffmann, "'From Lunch to Dinner': Virginia Woolf's Apprenticeship," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 10 (1969), 624.

<sup>3</sup> David Daiches, *Virginia Woolf* (Norfolk: New Directions, 1942), p. 61.

Daiches concludes the novel was written "for the sake of the impressions, of the fluid rendering of experience—one might say, for the sake of style."

<sup>4</sup> Alex Zwerdling, "Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy," *Journal of English Literary History*, 48 (1981), 912.

<sup>5</sup> The draft is contained in three bound notebooks. Many of the scenes are quickly sketched, but the sequence of the manuscript corresponds to that of the published text; most of the revising, expanding, and adding of additional scenes took place in a later draft. Volume I, dated April 15—Nov. 24, 1920, contains scenes from chapter I to the opening of chapter VIII. Volume II, dated Nov. 26, 1920, picks up chapter VIII and continues to chapter XII, to the scene of Jacob and Sandra on the Acropolis. Volume III, dated Mar. 12, 1922, contains only 22 pages of *Jacob's Room*, revisions or additions to chapters II, IV, X, XI, and the final chapter of the novel. The bulk of the volume is devoted to essays and "The Hours." It is clear that some of the manuscript material has not been preserved or located.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, "A Woman's College from Outside," in *Books and Portraits: Some Further Selections from Her Literary and Biographical Writings*, ed. Mary Lyon (London: Hogarth Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Dick, "Editing the Original Holograph Draft of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*," presented at the University of North Carolina, 24 Feb. 1983, and the University of Alberta, 11 May 1983. I am grateful to Professor Dick for allowing me to read the typescript of the paper.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse: The original holograph draft*, ed. Susan Dick (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1982), pp. 279 and 221.

<sup>9</sup> Zwerdling, "Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy," p. 900.

<sup>10</sup> Most critics agree with Barry Morgenstern that "the story is really as much about her process of reconstructing Jacob's life as it is about Jacob. Finally he eludes her, but she has created a portrait all the same—of herself"; see "The Self-Conscious Narrator in *Jacob's Room*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 18 (1972), 354.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, S. P. Rosenbaum, "The Philosophical Realism of Virginia Woolf," in *English Literature and British Philosophy*, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Virginia Woolf, "Notes on an Elizabethan Play," in *Collected Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), I, 55.

<sup>13</sup> Early commentators, such as James Hafley in *The Glass Roof: Virginia Woolf as Novelist* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), pp. 58–59, and J. K. Johnstone in *The Bloomsbury Group: A Study of E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, and Their Circle* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), p. 328, criticized the form, but recent critics have found it appropriate, and have been more concerned with the shifts in narrative point of view. Virginia Blain argues that "Woolf's technique deconstructs the whole notion of an integrated self as a unifying principle either for characterization or narration"; see "Narrative Voice and the Female Perspective in Virginia Woolf's Early Novels," in *Virginia Woolf: New Critical Essays*, ed. Patricia Clements and Isobel Grundy (London: Vision Press, 1983), p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Harper, *Between Language and Silence: The Novels of Virginia Woolf* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 106–07.

<sup>15</sup> Judy Little contends that the book is actually an "attack" on the form: "It

seems almost as though Virginia Woolf deliberately chose the traditions of the *Bildungsroman* in order to play havoc with them"; see "Jacob's Room as Comedy: Virginia Woolf's Parodic *Bildungsroman*," in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 109. Zwerdling in "Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy," notes that "unlike the conventional *Bildungsroman*, Jacob's Room lacks a teleology" (p. 898); and Avrom Fleishman argues that Woolf's novel extends the form into "a fitful sequence of unachieved experiences rather than a coherent process"; see *Virginia Woolf: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975), p. 46. See also Ralph Freedman, "The Form of Fact and Fiction: Jacob's Room as Paradigm," in *Virginia Woolf: Reevaluation and Continuity*, ed. Ralph Freedman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), pp. 129–31.

<sup>16</sup> Harper, *Between Language and Silence*, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> Blain, in "Narrative Voice and the Female Perspective in Virginia Woolf's Early Novels," notes how the opening departs from those of Woolf's two previous novels, in which an "external ironic viewpoint" gives "authority to the narrative voice" (p. 131), but Woolf's original beginning was very much in the same mode.

<sup>18</sup> Sara Ruddick, "Private Brother, Public World," in *New Feminist Essays*, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Zwerdling, "Jacob's Room: Woolf's Satiric Elegy," p. 904.

<sup>20</sup> Little, "Jacob's Room as Comedy," p. 117.



# “Nestor” and the Nightmare: The Presence of the Great War in *Ulysses*

ROBERT E. SPOO

In a recent account of the rise of English studies, Terry Eagleton has energetically claimed that literature, for the English ruling class of the years following the Great War, became “at once a solace and reaffirmation, a familiar ground on which Englishmen would regroup both to explore, and to find some alternative to, the nightmare of history.”<sup>1</sup> *Ulysses* is a work too complex to be readily quotable, but it has contributed this single memorable phrase, “the nightmare of history,” to our growing thesaurus of crisis. Actually, the phrase occurs nowhere in the pages of Joyce’s novel, for Stephen’s remark to Mr. Deasy in the “Nestor” episode runs: “History . . . is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (34.22–23; 2.377).<sup>2</sup> What is arresting about Eagleton’s use of the popular distillation of these words is the way he has appropriated it from its fictive historical context—June 16, 1904—and reinserted it in a wholly different, nonfictive context—the period which many Britons still call the Great War. Even more striking is the appositeness of his appropriation.

The nightmare metaphor, with its associations of oppression and helplessness, of predatory descent upon the innocently slumbering, came easily to those who experienced the breaking of war upon the unusually beautiful summer of 1914. D. H. Lawrence gave the title “The Nightmare” to the long digressive chapter on the war in *Kangaroo*, first published in 1923. Yeats, in “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen,” complained that “Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare / Rides upon sleep.”<sup>3</sup> As early as August 5, 1914, one day after the British

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declaration of war, Henry James referred to the situation as "a nightmare of the deepest dye"<sup>4</sup>; and in his correspondence during the next eight months he resorted to the word six more times to express his horror and frustration. Writing to Edith Wharton on August 19, 1914, James uncannily anticipated the words Joyce was to put in Stephen's mouth three years later: "Life goes on after a fashion, but I find it a nightmare from which there is no waking save by sleep."<sup>5</sup> Joyce could not have read James's letter before the appearance of Lubbock's edition of the correspondence in 1920, three years after "Nestor" had been sent to the typist.<sup>6</sup> But he need not have read it, for Stephen's remark is as much a part of the climate of the war as James's letters.

The three initial episodes of *Ulysses* were completed in late 1917 while Joyce was wintering in Locarno,<sup>7</sup> and he probably finished "Nestor" in November of that year. While the British were breaking the Hindenburg supporting line from St. Quentin to the Scarpe River, and the Bolsheviks were seizing Petrograd and deposing Kerensky, Joyce sat safely in neutral Switzerland and wrote about the Dublin of his youth, "kuskykorked . . . up tight in his inkbattle house," as the language of *Finnegans Wake* has it.<sup>8</sup> The Joyce of Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* puts the received view quite fairly and succinctly: "As an artist, naturally I attach no importance to the swings and roundabout of political history."<sup>9</sup>

But the text of *Ulysses* is not so indifferent. On careful examination, the "Nestor" episode reveals remarkable traces of the historical situation contemporaneous with its composition, an inscribing of the nightmare of the war within the ostensible neutrality of the 1904 narrative, so that the actualities of 1917 reverberate weirdly, almost allegorically, within the fictive time frame. Only one critic has suggested that the war influenced Joyce's narrative, and this observation is confined to the "disguised World War I imagery" in Stephen's thoughts about the hockey game his students play.<sup>10</sup> But the war is so pervasively present in "Nestor" that this episode bears comparison, as we shall see, with the contemporaneous poems of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Furthermore, this convergence of history and story within an episode whose symbol, according to Joyce's schema, is "history" raises important questions about Joyce's whole fictive enterprise in *Ulysses* and his place in the larger modernist response to "the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."

When Italy joined the war in May 1915, Joyce decided to move his family from Austro-Hungarian Trieste to Switzerland, and by the end of June they were in Zurich, "a symbol," Ellmann claims, "of artistic detachment, *au-dessus de la mêlée*."<sup>11</sup> Neutrality and detachment are

different matters, and it was difficult even for someone like Joyce to be wholly detached from the events taking place beyond the borders of Switzerland. Joyce's friend Frank Budgen remarked that Switzerland "is a small country with a long frontier and a long memory. At every point of the compass stands a powerful and dangerous neighbour. During the war all Swiss talked war strategy and politics, and in general all were pacifists."<sup>12</sup> We are just beginning to learn the extent of Joyce's pacifism and anarchism, largely due to Dominic Manganiello's important research,<sup>13</sup> but we do know that Joyce at this time had a lively if ironic interest in current events and political developments. In Zurich, he worked as a translator for the neutralist organ, the *International Review*, which had as part of its stated program the intention "to oppose to the campaign of lies a war of minds which shall shatter the unholy legends that are forming around us."<sup>14</sup> Though Joyce claimed to be indifferent to the war, he was not incapable of a real bitterness toward "those states . . . which have drowned the world in a blood-bath"<sup>15</sup>; and when he learned that Thomas Kettle, his boyhood friend and schoolmate, died fighting in the British army in France, he wrote a moving letter of condolence to Kettle's wife.<sup>16</sup>

Joyce had some knowledge of the war poetry of the time, enough at least to claim that a piece by the Viennese poet Felix Beran, "Des Weibes Klage," was "the only poem on the subject that at all interested him."<sup>17</sup> He translated it and gave it the title, "Lament for the Yeomen."<sup>18</sup> Joyce himself composed some comic poems about the war, minor affairs indeed but significant insofar as they register his extra-literary preoccupations at the time.<sup>19</sup> In one poem, he ridiculed an Austro-Hungarian official who he thought was evading military service:

For he said it is bet—bet—better  
To stick stamps on some God-damned letter  
Than be shot in a trench  
Amid shells and stench,  
Jesus Gott—Donner wet-wet-wetter.<sup>20</sup>

He also wrote a limerick on Lloyd George which he sent to Claud Sykes, the typist of "Nestor" and other early episodes.<sup>21</sup>

Both of these occasional poems were composed in November 1917, roughly at the time Joyce completed "Nestor." They do in a crude and obvious way what "Nestor" does much more subtly: they register, under unlikely formal auspices, attitudes toward the situation of 1917. The second episode of *Ulysses* is, on even a casual perusal, suffused with war. As it opens, Stephen is drilling his students on Pyrrhus' military career. One of the boys, Cochrane, is certain "There was a battle," but when

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prodded for more he says, "I forget the place, sir. 279 B.C." He manages, though, to recall Pyrrhus' famous remark, "*Another victory like that and we are done for*" (24.16; 2.14, Joyce's emphasis). Cochrane's poor memory allows the Battle of Asculum to grade into all battles, and though Stephen gives the boy the textbook answer, he silently approves the blurring: "From a hill above a corpsestrewn plain a general speaking to his officers, leaned upon his spear. Any general to any officers. They lend ear" (24.18–20; 2.16–17). Any general to any officers, indeed. In 1917, generals were trying to explain, to themselves as well as their officers, how such a Pyrrhic event as the Somme could have taken place. After the Armistice, Joyce bitterly paraphrased the Greek general's words by asking, "Who won this war?"<sup>22</sup>

Later in "Nestor," Stephen encounters the imperialism and bigotry of his employer, Garrett Deasy, an old schoolmaster of Ulsterite sympathies. Beneath the obvious naturalistic level of their "dialogue" (as Joyce described it in one of his schemata) we can detect the outlines of what Ronald Bush has called the "popular mythology" of the old men and the young soldiers, a mythology by which "the soldier poets of World War I pictured old folks safe behind the lines and youth dying at the front."<sup>23</sup> In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Orwell recalls this myth vividly:

By 1918 everyone under forty was in a bad temper with his elders, and the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting was extended into a general revolt against orthodoxy and authority. At that time there was, among the young, a curious cult of hatred of "old men." The dominance of "old men" was held to be responsible for every evil known to humanity, and every accepted institution from Scott's novels to the House of Lords was derided merely because "old men" were in favour of it.<sup>24</sup>

This is the mood of "Nestor," wherein Deasy is seen from the point of view of the young, bored, and skeptical Stephen. We are told that Deasy's "old man's voice cried sternly" (29.16–17; 2.193–94) and that with his finger he "beat the air oddly before his voice spoke" (33.26–27; 2.345). At the end of the episode, Joyce's prose vividly captures the schoolmaster's decrepitude: "A coughball of laughter leaped from his throat dragging after it a rattling chain of phlegm" (36.15–16; 2.443–44). John Maynard Keynes, another young man appalled by the treachery of the older generation, used similar language to describe Clemenceau at the Paris Peace Conference: "He spoke seldom . . . he closed his eyes often . . . and the sudden outburst of words, often

followed by a fit of deep coughing from the chest, produced their impression rather by force and surprise than by persuasion.”<sup>25</sup> In Canto VII (composed in 1919), Ezra Pound speaks of the “rattle of old men’s voices,”<sup>26</sup> which Bush links directly to the old-men mythology. It is possible that, impressed as he was by the initial episodes of *Ulysses*, Pound was drawing in part upon his memory of Mr. Deasy.<sup>27</sup>

Deasy’s Homeric counterpart is the old warrior and horse-tamer Nestor, who, in Book III of *The Odyssey*, recounts to Telemachus the events of the Trojan War and after. But Deasy is also a happy warrior of the nineteenth-century type, full of hardy Victorian optimism and high-sounding imperialistic rhetoric, exactly the type who promoted and welcomed the war and continued to defend it even after it had become a nightmare. He could easily double for the old man in Siegfried Sassoon’s bitter “They” (composed about a year before “Nestor”), which dramatizes a dialogue between “the Bishop” and “the boys.”<sup>28</sup> Invoking Providence “‘a just cause: they lead the attack / on Anti-Christ’”), the Bishop predicts that the boys will be profoundly changed by their glorious battle experience. The boys counter ironically with descriptions of the changes that bullets and mortars have worked on them and their friends. To all of this the Bishop says blandly, “‘The Ways of God are strange!’”<sup>29</sup> Deasy is also a good nineteenth-century providentialist, certain that history moves toward “the manifestation of God” (34.27–28; 2.380–81). When Stephen’s bitter contrariness finds climactic expression in his remark about history being a nightmare, Deasy calmly replies, “‘The ways of the Creator are not our ways’” (34.26; 2.380).

Like the bishop in “They,” Deasy is not really listening. His responses are like those of Churchill in 1918 when he tried to talk sense into an angry, disillusioned Siegfried Sassoon. The young man was dumbfounded: “Transfixed and submissive in my chair, I realized that what had begun as a persuasive confutation of my anti-war convictions was now addressed, in pauseful and perorating prose, to no one in particular.”<sup>30</sup> Deasy’s Kiplingesque rhetoric about an Englishman’s proudest boast (“I paid my way”) and his easy phrases about generosity and justice elicit from Stephen only the cryptic utterance, “I fear those big words . . . which make us so unhappy” (31.12–13; 2.264). This could be Wilfred Owen repudiating big words like “glory, honour, dominion or power, except War.”<sup>31</sup> Hemingway’s Frederick Henry finds such “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.”<sup>32</sup> And in

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Robert Graves's poem "Big Words," a young infantryman bucks himself up for twenty lines with rhetoric supplied by the home front. "But on the firestep, waiting to attack, / He cursed, prayed, sweated, wished the proud words back."<sup>33</sup>

The theme of British imperialism in *Ulysses* links Deasy with Haines, the English Oxonian who appears in "Telemachus" and is, for Stephen, an embodiment of the oppressive British Empire. As Deasy prattles on about "the pride of the English," a memory of Haines's eyes comes to Stephen: "The seas' ruler. His seacold eyes looked on the empty bay" (30.33; 2.246). After Deasy denounces the Jews as destroyers of civilization, we learn that "His eyes open wide in vision stared sternly across the sunbeam in which he halted" (33.41–42; 2.357–58). Haines, too, is anti-Semitic, fearing that his country may fall into the hands of "German jews" (21.21; 1.667). Stephen tackles Deasy head on in "Nestor": "A merchant . . . is one who buys cheap and sells dear, jew or gentile, is he not?" (34.1–2; 2.359–60).<sup>34</sup> In "Telemachus," Stephen's silent rebuttal of Haines on the same issue is identical but imbedded so subtly in the narrative as to be almost undetectable. When Haines has delivered his brief speech on "our national problem," the narrative shifts to something Stephen has been contemplating: "Two men stood at the verge of the cliff, watching: businessman, boatman" (21.23–24; 1.669–70).

Deasy and Haines are linked by their views of history as well. Haines placidly remarks that "It seems history is to blame" for the Irish problem (20.40; 1.649); and Deasy refers all the turmoil of the past to "one great goal, the manifestation of God." Jon Silkin's analysis of the Bishop's hypocrisy in "They" applies equally to such abdications of historical responsibility: "The earthly doings of the Church (encouraging enlistment) may bring earthly consequences, but the responsibility for them is passed on to God who, as most sceptics know (the Bishop perhaps among them), can be relied on to keep his mouth shut."<sup>35</sup>

"England is in the hands of the jews," Deasy announces to Stephen. "As sure as we are standing here the jew merchants are already at their work of destruction. Old England is dying" (33.28–34; 2.346–51). There is something pathetically foolish about this pronouncement once we consider the double time frame of "Nestor." England was indeed dying as Joyce wrote this, dying by the thousands in a fiasco from which its aristocracy has never recovered. But the causes of the war, as Joyce well knew, were more along the lines of Stephen's analysis than Deasy's. There is a disorienting moment in "Nestor" when a more honest interpretation of the war breaks suddenly into the naturalistic narrative,

a dislocation of language and temporality in which Joyce's words seem to speak in ghostly diagnosis of his times: "May I trespass on your valuable space. That doctrine of *laissez faire* which so often in our history. Our cattle trade. The way of all our old industries. Liverpool ring which jockeyed the Galway harbour scheme. European conflagration . . ." (33.1-4; 2.324-27). This is Stephen skimming Deasy's letter about foot-and-mouth disease, but it is also an unidentified ironic voice reading out a kind of fragmentary, laundry-list synopsis of the international market competition that lay behind the "European conflagration" of 1914.

Compare that fragmentary summary with a passage from the Epilogue (not published until 1971) to D. H. Lawrence's *Movements in European History* (1921); Lawrence is talking about the recent war:

At first, plenty of room for all, and competition is the best thing possible, and equality of opportunity is the ideal. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Then some nations forge ahead, and get a stranglehold upon the natural resources around them. Still there must be progress, expansion, progress, expansion, free competition. All very well. But you can't progress upwards if another great tree has risen and sent out branches above you. . . . Then you've either got to give in, and gradually, gradually have the light of day taken from you. Or you have to fight.<sup>36</sup>

In "Eumeus," Leopold Bloom makes the same point:

All those wretched quarrels, in his humble opinion, stirring up bad blood . . . erroneously supposed to be about a punctilio of honour and a flag . . . were very largely a question of the money question which was at the back of everything, greed and jealousy, people never knowing when to stop. (643.34-39; 16.1111-15)

That Bloom's view of the causes of war agrees with the strange intruding voice in "Nestor" is one more example of the authority Joyce vested in this Dublin Odysseus.

In *The Odyssey*, Telemachus seeks out Nestor for information about his father. For Stephen in *Ulysses* Deasy is both the aged counselor and the first in a series of potential father-figures that includes Bloom as its most promising and fully rendered member. Though Stephen is harried by the memory of his dying mother, the reality and dependability of maternal love are never really questioned in the novel. It is the father's devotion that poses the real problem. *Ulysses* seems continually to be asking, What should a father do for his son? What does a son owe his father? Is there a vital connection, beyond blood, between them? Or as Stephen puts it in "Scylla and Charybdis," "Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?"

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(207.28–30; 9.844–45). The war poets, and others who were articulate and honest about the European situation from 1916 on, were also asking these questions. The classic formulation of this war *topos* is Wilfred Owen's "Parable of the Old Men and the Young," a retelling of the Abraham and Isaac story in which a latter-day patriarch is preparing to sacrifice his son amid "parapets and trenches." Suddenly an angel bids him, "Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him." "But the old man would not so, but slew his son."<sup>37</sup>

Osbert Sitwell also united the old-men mythology to the theme of the father's betrayal when he wrote of "These grand old men, who still can see and talk, / Who sacrifice each other's sons each day."<sup>38</sup> In "Canzone à la Sonata," Ford Madox Ford put the question that was being asked more and more as the war went on: "What's left behind us for a heritage / For our young children? What but nameless fear?"<sup>39</sup> And Kipling, whose war poetry changed dramatically after his only son as killed in action at Loos, asked, in the persona of a dead statesman, "What tale shall serve me here among / Mine angry and defrauded young?"<sup>40</sup> In "Nestor," the general theme of the father and his responsibility is partly informed by these more urgent and immediate questionings of paternity. Leopold Bloom, the novel's honorary paternal ideal, becomes Joyce's spokesman for all fathers when, in "Eumeus," he denounces "the misery and suffering [that war propaganda] entailed as a foregone conclusion on fine young fellows, chiefly, destruction of the fittest, in a word" (657.17–19; 16.1600–02).

The destruction of the fittest is a grim potentiality lurking behind the schoolroom scene in "Nestor," for the boys Stephen teaches in 1904—most of them from well-to-do families with English or Scottish names like Cochrane, Talbot, and Armstrong—will be officer material in ten years. They were being killed as Joyce created their fictive counterparts. Just as the 1904 setting contains the horror of 1917, so the boys in Deasy's school carry their future tragedy within them, implicitly and potentially. They are like Jacob Flanders in Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922), whose death in the war is foretold in his name from the beginning of the novel. Woolf was still working with the traditional novel form which reports a "history" spanning a conventional number of years, so what is implicit in the first chapter can convincingly be made explicit in the last (as Jacob's death and the full significance of his name become "facts" fully prepared for by the whole course of the novel).

But Joyce could only gesture at such "explications" of the implicit, since he had restricted himself, on the naturalist level, to the narrative

of a single day. *Ulysses* is committed to intensive rather than temporally extensive revelations of plot and character, and it relies upon symbol and theme as gestures toward potentialities when character development is forced to recede. The narrative present therefore becomes saturated with the past and the future, in some cases overdetermined by them, so that the present naturalistic moment is never quite itself and cannot be taken simply at face value.<sup>41</sup> Stephen's students are both hockey players and infantrymen, schoolboys and victims.

Joyce intimates this potential victimization through the restless mind of the young schoolteacher. As E. L. Epstein has suggested, Stephen thinks of the boys' hockey game in imagery that blends medieval warfare with the horrific accounts of trench conditions and bayonet-fighting: "Jousts. Time shocked rebounds, shock by shock. Jousts, slush and uproar of battles, the frozen deathspew of the slain, a shout of spear spikes baited with men's bloodied guts" (32.33–36; 2.316–18). As early as *Stephen Hero* Joyce had his main character deprecate field sports as "mimic warfare."<sup>42</sup> When Stephen first sees Deasy, the old man is returning to the schoolhouse "from the scrappy field where sharp voices were in strife" (29.6; 2.184–85). Deasy has been sorting the boys into teams, and as he and Stephen converse, the crack of hockey sticks can be heard from the field. A nearly allegorical configuration begins to emerge here, with the young poet confronting the old man/father while the boys engage in a "joust" which the old man has arranged: exactly the structural paradigm, implicit or explicit, of most of the war poems we have been discussing.

Stephen's compassion for the student who stays behind for help with his algebra is partly explainable in terms of this pattern. For Stephen must order the boy, whose name is Sargent, out into the fray at Deasy's command (29.3–4; 2.182–83). Stephen pities Sargent for his weakness and awkwardness, and senses that, had it not been for the boy's mother, "the race of the world would have trampled him under foot, a squashed boneless snail" (27.35–37; 2.141–42). This last image is reminiscent of the words spoken by the Chorus of the Years in *The Dynasts* as the two armies encamp on the eve of Waterloo: "The snail draws in at the terrible tread, / But in vain; he is crushed by the fellowe-rim."<sup>43</sup> Stephen's compassion for Sargent has some of the overtones of the English officer's concern for his men, a concern which, as Bernard Bergonzi shows, often resembled paternal responsibility (Owen's poetry of pity is the classic example).<sup>44</sup> Caught as he is between Deasy and the schoolboys, Stephen becomes a kind of officer-figure, and his feeling for Sargent adds to the developing theme of fatherhood

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in the novel. There is a faint hint of the military relationship between Deasy and Stephen in the latter's thinking, "Any general to any officer. They lend ear," and when he leaves the schoolhouse with Deasy's editorial in hand, he muses, "Still I will help him in his fight" (36.1-2; 2.430).

The war enters "Nestor" also through the rich ambiguities of the word "goal." The "goals" which the boys score on the hockey field are contrasted with Deasy's claim that "All history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God." Stephen drives this contrast home with his rejoinder that God is "A shout in the street," by which he is indicating, specifically, a cheer that has gone up after another goal (34.28-34; 2.380-86). But "goal" acquires a special resonance once its military sense is taken into account. In his discussion of Great War euphemisms, Paul Fussell explains how "goal" was high diction for "the objective of an attack" (as in Edmund Blunden's "Come On; My Lucky Lads": "The dawn that hangs behind the goal").<sup>45</sup> The usage drew upon the quasi-military associations of public-school football, exploited in Henry Newbolt's popular "Vitai Lampada" ("Play up, play up! and play the game!"). In *Lord Northcliffe's War Book* (1917), English tank crews are said to "enter upon their task in a sporting spirit with the same cheery enthusiasm as they would show for football."<sup>46</sup> Even C. E. Montague, whose *Disenchantment* (1922) explores the demoralizing effects of the war, instinctively reaches for a cricket simile to illustrate the impersonality of modern warfare: "With eleven a-side a Grace or an Armstrong may win a game off his own bat. He will hardly do that in a game where the sides are eleven thousand apiece."<sup>47</sup> It is not surprising, then, that Captain Neville commenced his ill-fated attack at the Somme by having his men kick footballs toward the German trenches.<sup>48</sup>

Deasy's providentialist use of "goal" is a different matter, but it too has war resonances. Of course, imperialistic rhetoric in 1904 as well as 1917 drew on such respectable sonorities as the final lines of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, which speak of

That God, which ever lives and loves,  
One God, one law, one element,  
And one far-off divine event,  
To which the whole creation moves.

Matthew Arnold's "Westminster Abbey" offers the same assurance:

For this and that way swings  
The flux of mortal things,  
Though moving only to one far-set goal.  
(11.160-62)<sup>49</sup>

But the war gave a special flavor to this theology. Kipling's famous "For All We Have and Are" merges the Tennysonian telos with the other senses of "goal" we have been examining: "No easy hopes or lies / Shall bring us to our goal."<sup>50</sup> It was this complex fusion of meanings drawn from various aspects of English life that made the word so emotionally potent, so easy for patriots and patriotic poets to conjure with. Wilfred Owen attempted to deflate the word entirely in "Disabled," a poem about a legless convalescent soldier: "Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal."<sup>51</sup>

Deasy's ostensibly prewar use of "goal" picks up these resonances, especially as his pontifications have the schoolboys' mimic warfare as a backdrop. The invoking of Providence for military victory was so natural during the war years that Douglas Haig could write his wife on the eve of the Somme, "I feel that every step in my plan has been taken with the Divine help."<sup>52</sup> The tragedy that extended from the first of July into November of 1916 cruelly undermined this assurance, making even patriots ask themselves what kind of God was presiding over the war. Stephen's remark to Deasy—that God is a "shout in the street"—implicitly asks the same bitter question, for the God Stephen refers to as he gestures toward the hockey field has more in common with Mars than with the Christian deity. In "Scylla and Charybdis," Stephen describes this being as "the lord of things as they are . . . *dio boia*, hangman god . . . ostler and butcher" (213.22–24; 98.1047–50). Joyce expressed the very same notion in the last line of his limerick on Lloyd George, written during the period in which he completed "Nestor":

There's a George of the Georges named David  
With whose words we are now night and day fed.

He cries: I'll give small rations  
To all the small nations.

Bully God made this world—but I'll save it.<sup>53</sup>

This ruffian God is Stephen's shout in the street, and in "Nestor" the notion is thoroughly conditioned by the disenchantment with providentialist certainties prevalent by 1917. In that year Wilfred Owen wrote "Exposure," with its richly ambiguous lines on Providence:

For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;  
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,

For love of God seems dying.<sup>54</sup>

That last line is susceptible of several readings, but the mood of Stephen's rejoinder to Deasy will be present in every one.

Of what significance is this double time frame in "Nestor"? First of all, it is important that we recognize, as Joyce critics are more and more

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asking us to do,<sup>55</sup> that Joyce's texts frequently give the lie to his pose of indifference to any history or politics not directly concerned with his picture of the Dublin of his youth. Joyce's "inkbattle house" was not quite so inhospitable as has been supposed. Shira Wolosky, in a similar corrective reading of a major figure, has argued that the horror of the Civil War can be detected in Emily Dickinson's "hymnody of the attic":

Her personal conflict takes on military proportions, and in this it reflects actual events in the world of history. That the personal is foremost does not obviate the fact that, in 1862, the bodiless campaign within the poet's soul had an objective counterpart in physical and palpable warfare.<sup>56</sup>

Wolosky emphasizes not the transformative powers of Dickinson's lyric soul but, quite properly, those actualities through which she, like everyone else, lived and suffered and which she was unable to translate wholly into a private idiom. An entire school of Joyce criticism, led by Hugh Kenner, has been concerned with the historical and empirical Dublin in Joyce's writings; it seems but a logical step from there to examining the impingement of other historical matters on those texts.

Henry James's war letters reveal a sensitive mind responding with almost inconceivable rapidity and prescience to the nightmare of history. No sooner had England declared war than James was deplored the situation as

a thing that so gives away the whole long age during which we have supposed the world to be, with whatever abatement, gradually bettering, that to have to take it all now for what the treacherous years were all the while really making for and meaning is too tragic for any words.<sup>57</sup>

For James, the fact that history had betrayed its latent meaning posed a special problem for serious writers. On February 14, 1915, he wrote to Hugh Walpole that he was, after many months, returning to work. He wondered, however, whether it was possible to write under the changed conditions:

The subject-matter of one's effort has become *itself* utterly treacherous and false—its relation to reality utterly given away and smashed. Reality is a world that was to be capable of *this*—and how represent that horrific capability, *historically* latent, historically ahead of it? How on the other hand *not* represent it either—without putting into play mere fiddlesticks? [James's emphases]<sup>58</sup>

These questions are impressively profound and entirely to the point in our discussion of "Nestor." James wants to know how, if literature is supposed to reflect reality—and we must remember that, up until the

war, he had been working on *The Ivory Tower*, a novel about the "present"—how it can do so without also acknowledging reality's latent treachery, a treachery which had recently become all too overt. In other words, how write a novel about the modern world, with men and women as we know them, without somehow figuring the war into the account? There is no going back, James feels, no blinking at the facts, for we know what we know. His concern is also, characteristically, with literary form. How represent such a nightmare as the one that has descended upon us? Which window of the House of Fiction will give properly onto this scene?

Joyce must have ruminated these issues too, and with a special sense of the difficulties involved, for he was writing a novel that had to pretend, if it was to have the courage of its fictions, that by "the War" was meant the distant Russo-Japanese conflict or the recent suppression of the Boers. Joyce's solution was a radical one: to allow historical verisimilitude to accommodate, even to be ruptured by, elements foreign to its texture. Here Joyce's dependence on themes reveals its importance, for the themes of "Nestor"—fatherhood; the conflict between youth and age; the terror of history—become repositories for the actualities of 1917, just as those same themes gather into themselves historical matters previous to 1904 (the incidents of *The Odyssey*, for example). *Ulysses* is, in this sense, uninhibitedly transhistorical, already tending toward the vertiginous spontaneity of temporal movement that characterizes *Finnegans Wake*. And like the *Wake*, it is an "aleatoric" work, freely welcoming the momentary and adventitious into its fabric, and allowing the present instant in all its contingency to help shape the rendering of an ostensibly separate, objective "past."

*Ulysses* is not the only work of its time to let the war into a structure and language seemingly concerned with other matters. It is common to see *The Waste Land* as a war or postwar poem which achieves its effects partly through occasional and indirect reference to military matters (such as Albert's demobbing and the ships at Mylae). According to Bernard Bergonzi, Pound's "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (completed in 1917) uses the Rome of Augustus as a way of commenting on wartime England.<sup>59</sup> And Lytton Strachey, in his Preface to *Eminent Victorians* (1918), prescribed these tactics for the historian of the Victorian Age:

It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict that singular epoch. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he

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will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined.<sup>60</sup>

Here the pacifist Strachey, with tongue devilishly in cheek, makes use of images ranging from night-fighting in No Man's Land to an assault on the Schlieffen wing.

The breaking of the war into these texts could be interpreted as one solution to what James saw as the problem facing writers after August 4, 1914. Strachey's Preface, for instance, takes account of recent events through a kind of jaunty mimesis of the eruption into history of its latent horror and treachery. *Ulysses*, not only in "Nestor" but throughout the earlier episodes, also dramatizes this explosion of repressed forces. It is easy to pass over the battle imagery in "Telemachus," for example, though much of that episode takes place in a defense tower built during the Napoleonic Wars, the last time England had seriously feared invasion. In the first three pages of *Ulysses*, the word "gunrest" appears four times, "barracks" once, and "parapet"—a term to be met with in almost any account of trench warfare—four times. As Stephen and Buck Mulligan converse, they seem to be waging a kind of choreographed battle: Mulligan "came forward and mounted the round gunrest"; then he "skipped off the gunrest." Stephen "sat down on the edge of the gunrest." Mulligan "mounted to the parapet again," and "Stephen stood up and went over to the parapet." And all this goes on, of course, as they do emotional and intellectual battle.

We know that Joyce was completing "Scylla and Charybdis," the ninth episode of *Ulysses*, when the Armistice was declared, for he had been working on it since October and the Rosenbach Manuscript shows a dateline of "New Year's Eve, 1918" at the end of the section. This partly explains Stephen's strange passivity and resignation at the end of an episode that has seen him so strenuously at war with the Dublin idealists and the scoffer Mulligan. As Stephen follows Mulligan out of the library, Joyce's language becomes serene, almost pastorally content: "Kind air defined the coigns of houses in Kildare street" (218.5; 9.1218). And Stephen's thoughts, concluding Part I of *Ulysses*, imply a farewell to arms: "Cease to strive. Peace of the druid priests of Cymbeline" (218.8; 9.1221). The next episode, "Wandering Rocks," the first to be composed free of the war, provides an "entr'acte," as Joyce called it, "a pause in the action."

The more we recognize the variety and complexity of historical textures in *Ulysses*, the harder it is to accept unquestioningly Eliot's view that Joyce's "mythic method" provides a way "of controlling, of

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ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."<sup>61</sup> Such a method would require a static conception of history in which present and past are distinct from one another and observable by an ordering consciousness (a mind "manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity"). But if past and present, or history and not-yet-history, are observable, then from what vantage, at what remove, are they to be observed? How can we get sufficiently outside the futility and anarchy to bring history and tradition to bear upon them? How, in short, can we rouse ourselves from the nightmare of history in order to begin to apprehend other perspectives?

*Ulysses* asks these questions earnestly and continuously. June 16, 1904, was not, for Joyce, a fixed, isolable "contemporaneity" to be ordered by a fixed, isolable "antiquity," and the Eliot of *The Waste Land* knew this even if Eliot the essayist chose to give a different impression. The very process of composition ensures the inscribing of the chaotic "present" into any continuous parallel that a narrative might hope to manipulate, and no book is more aware of this than *Ulysses* with its crucial theme of parallax, a reckoning of the observer and the point of observation into the observed. The law of parallax rules historiography as well, for every attempt to locate and clarify our antecedents entails the obfuscations of language and vantage. "Nestor" shows how, try as we might to relegate history to the dispassionate inculcations of the classroom, its nightmares will not be hushed away in textbooks. Likewise, Joyce's text, though ostensibly out of battle, is a neutral zone crossed and recrossed by rumors and phantoms of what Henry James, eloquent in despair, called "the Great Interruption."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ulysses* page references are given for the 1961 Random House edition and the three-volume "Critical and Synoptic Edition," prepared by Hans Walter Gabler, et al. (New York and London: Garland, 1984). Citations are from RH 1961.

<sup>3</sup> *The Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Macmillan, 1983), p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of Henry James*, ed. Percy Lubbock, II (1920; rpt. New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 384.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 391.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen's assertion about history is not one of the later additions to "Nestor."

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), p. 419.

<sup>8</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939; rpt. Penguin Books, 1984), p. 176.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Travesties* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 50. The actual remark on which Stoppard modeled his version is less apolitical: "As an artist, I attach no importance to political conformity." (Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 446.)

<sup>10</sup> See E. L. Epstein's essay on "Nestor" in *James Joyce's "Ulysses": Critical Essays*, eds. Clive Hart and David Hayman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1977), pp. 22 and 23-24.

<sup>11</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 386.

<sup>12</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"* (1934; rpt. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960), p. 31.

<sup>13</sup> See Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics* (London: Routledge, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> In conversation with Georges Borach on 21 Oct. 1918. Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 446.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, pp. 399-400. Kettle was a war poet whose sonnet, "To My Daughter Betty," written four days before he was killed at the Somme, has been frequently anthologized. See the *Anthology of War Poetry, 1914-1918*, ed. Robert Nichols (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1943), p. 116; and *Up the Line to Death: The War Poets, 1914-1918*, ed. Brian Gardner (1964; rpt. London: Magnum Books, 1976), pp. 95-96.

<sup>17</sup> Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 432n.

<sup>19</sup> Joyce's humorous occasional verse—mostly limericks and verses based on popular songs—is in miniature what *Finnegans Wake*, that sprawling occasional work, is on a gigantic scale. Through parody and pastiche, these works allow the present moment spontaneously to enter the framework of the item parodied. This superimposition of one time frame upon another is a variation of what Joyce achieved in "Nestor."

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Ellman, *James Joyce*, p. 420.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>22</sup> Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of "Ulysses"*, p. 166.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's "Cantos"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 267.

<sup>24</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Gollancz, 1937), p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> From Keynes' *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919). Quoted in Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's "Cantos"*, p. 272.

<sup>26</sup> "Three Cantos by Ezra Pound," *Dial*, 71 (Aug. 1921), 205.

<sup>27</sup> Bush argues that Joyce's treatment of history in "Nestor" influenced Eliot's "Gerontion" and some of the early *Cantos*. Curiously, he does not relate the portrait of Deasy to the old-men mythology, nor does he suggest what seems to me such a rich possibility, that Eliot's little old man and Pound's murmuring and rattling old men might derive in part from the schoolmaster in *Ulysses*. See Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos*, pp. 183-263, esp. pp. 216-24.

<sup>28</sup> The dialogue form is another feature "Nestor" shares with so much war literature. It would seem that a confrontational mode was the one best suited to a situation in which an urgent message had to be conveyed to unsympathetic

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authorities and a complacent home front. The dialogue was so natural to war writers that when, in 1940, Robert Nichols, a poet of the First World War, assembled his *Anthology of War Poetry: 1914–1918*, he included a Preface of 100 pages set up as a formal dialogue between the Anthologist (himself) and Julian Tennyson, a young man who has “just been called up” to fight Hitler.

<sup>29</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), pp.

23–24.

<sup>30</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Siegfried's Journey, 1916–1920* (London: Faber and Faber, 1945), p. 78.

<sup>31</sup> From the Preface to *Poems* (London: Chatto, 1920), p. vii.

<sup>32</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929; rpt. New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 185.

<sup>33</sup> In *The Muse in Arms*, ed. E. B. Osborn (London: John Murray, 1917), p.

25.

<sup>34</sup> Stephen and Deasy's debate strongly resembles a dialogue (“dialettica”) dramatized by the Italian historian Guglielmo Ferrero in his section on socialism in *L'Europa giovane* (1897), a work Joyce read in 1906–07 and drew on for details in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*. Ferrero sketches a “torneo” between an anti-Semite and a socialist, part of which runs:

The anti-Semite says to the people: “The Jew is your enemy; he enslaves you and compels you to work for him, robbing you of your labor. Rise and hunt him down.” But the socialist replies: “The Jew indeed robs the laborer of his work and forces him to work for him, but because he is a capitalist, not because he is circumcised.” (p. 63)

(*L'Europa giovane: Studi e viaggi nei paesi del nord* [1897; rpt. Cernusco sul Naviglio: Garzanti, 1946]. The translation is mine; no English translation of this work exists.) At the time Joyce read Ferrero he was much interested in socialist politics and considered himself something of an anarchist.

<sup>35</sup> Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Movements in European History* (1921; rpt. with hitherto unpublished Epilogue, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), p. 311.

<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Poems*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> From his poem “Arm-chair,” reprinted in Gardner, ed., *Up the Line to Death*, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Selected Poems*, ed. Basil Bunting (Cambridge, Mass.: Pym-Randall Press, 1971), p. 89.

<sup>40</sup> From “A Dead Statesman,” reprinted in Gardner, ed., *Up the Line to Death*, p. 148.

<sup>41</sup> These speculations have been assisted by A. Walton Litz's excellent essay on “Ithaca,” in Hart and Hayman, eds., *James Joyce's “Ulysses”*: *Critical Essays*, esp. pp. 400–01.

<sup>42</sup> James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (1944, rpt. New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts* (1904, 1906, 1908; rpt. New York: St. Martin's, 1965), p. 483.

<sup>44</sup> See Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965), pp. 122–23.

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (New York: Brentano's, 1922), p. 191.

<sup>48</sup> Mentioned in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 27.

<sup>49</sup> Weldon Thornton, *Allusions in "Ulysses": An Annotated List* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 39, offers both of these passages as Victorian glosses on Deasy's "one great goal, the manifestation of God."

<sup>50</sup> Reprinted in *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War, 1914–1917*, ed. George Herbert Clarke (Boston: Houghton, 1917), p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Poems*, p. 33.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Ellmann, *James Joyce*, p. 420.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Poems*, p. 19. See Jon Silkin's careful analysis of these lines in his *Out of Battle*, pp. 204–06.

<sup>55</sup> See, in addition to Manganiello's *Joyce's Politics*, the essays in *James Joyce and Modern Literature*, eds. W. J. McCormick and Alistair Stead (London: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>56</sup> Shira Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1984), p. xviii.

<sup>57</sup> Letter of 4–5 Aug. 1914, in Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James*, II, 384.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>59</sup> Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight*, p. 139. See Pound's letter to Thomas Hardy (31 Mar. 1921), in which he speaks of "the doubling of me and Propertius, England to-day and Rome under Augustus." Reprinted in Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound* (Penguin Modern Masters, 1976), pp. 46–47.

<sup>60</sup> Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (New York: Putnam's, n.d.), p. v.

<sup>61</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Ulysses, Order and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, 1975), p. 177. Ronald Bush, *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's "Cantos"*, p. 210, agrees with Eliot: "One way of describing Ulysses is to chart the reader's historical awareness of Dublin life as it progresses from identification with Stephen's myopia to an understanding achieved by layer upon layer of implied literary and historical parallels. By the end of the novel Stephen has been placed in a tradition."

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Mrs. Alfred Sutro (8 Aug. 1914), in Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James*, II, 387.

# Family Romance as National Allegory in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Dreaming of the Bones*

JOSEPH CHADWICK

In view of the many topical poems Yeats wrote and their importance in his canon, it is surprising to note that he wrote only two plays that focus on specific events in Irish political history: *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902), which examines the 1798 rebellion, and *The Dreaming of the Bones* (1917), which examines the 1916 Rising. This fact registered, it is not so surprising to find that these two plays share certain similarities. Both focus on moments of revolutionary crisis. Both involve young men confronting spiritual figures who in different ways personify Ireland. And both set up this confrontation through the device of a family romance, a fantastic narrative rooted in a psychically charged struggle between parent and child. By adopting this Freudian category (and others) in my analysis of the two plays' dramatic situations, I am not suggesting that the political problems the two plays thematize can be reduced to individual psychological conflicts. Rather, these categories provide ways of showing how the plays' psychic situations, dramatic conflicts acted out "in the depths of the mind,"<sup>1</sup> constitute allegories of Irish nationality.

The family romance of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, as I will argue, forms the basis of an extremely idealistic national (and nationalist) allegory, one which defines a clear-cut conflict between colonizer and colonized as the fundamental problem facing Irish society. The family romance of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, however, proposes an allegory which claims

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equal importance for the conflicts within the colonized society and psyche, conflicts which the earlier play effectively represses. *The Dreaming of the Bones*, that is, offers a critical rewriting of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a rewriting which radically revises the earlier play's allegory and sketches the crisis in social relations posed by Ireland's attempt to awaken from the nightmare of its history.

The family romance of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* centers on Michael Gillane's responses to three women: his mother Bridget, his fiancée Delia Cahel, and the Poor Old Woman, who is also the "young girl" with "the walk of a queen" that Patrick Gillane sees at the play's end.<sup>2</sup> Michael rejects both his mother's protective advice and his fiancée's love and money in order to devote himself to the Old Woman, who tells him that "many a man has died for love of me" (p. 224). He decides, that is, to devote himself to an idealized fulfillment of Oedipal desire: a Poor Old Woman who is also a queenly young girl, a mother who is also a lover. Not surprisingly, Bridget and Delia are the characters who react most strongly to this decision, Delia crying: "Michael, Michael! You won't leave me! You won't join the French and we going to be married!" (p. 231). For Michael leaves his mother and fiancée not only to join the French, but also to devote himself to a figure who combines key features of both women.

Michael's devotion to this figure, of course, can only operate at an ideal level. It is a political rather than a strictly sexual devotion, and it is made possible by the appearance of a supernatural, phantasmal mother-figure who personifies Ireland: the Poor Old Woman who was put to wandering because of "Too many strangers in the house" and has lost the "four beautiful green fields" of Leinster, Ulster, Munster, and Connaught (pp. 222, 223). But by representing Michael's decision to join the 1798 rebellion as a choice between Delia and the Poor Old Woman, the play identifies a certain pattern of Oedipal desire as a psychic mechanism through which nationalist political devotion may operate. That pattern does not involve what Freud would call the "more normal" or "positive" resolution to the Oedipal struggle, in which the son intensifies his identification with his father and seeks substitutes for his mother rather than the mother herself.<sup>3</sup> For in this case the son not only devotes himself to a highly idealized political version of the mother who is also a lover, but also rebels against a political version of paternal authority (of what Lacan would call the Name-of-the-Father), which we can conveniently label John Bull.

This rejection of the "positive" resolution of the Oedipal struggle produces behavior incomprehensible to those who have accepted (or

who would prefer to ignore) that political/paternal authority: Bridget says that Michael "has the look of a man that has got the touch" (p. 229), and Peter, urged to tell Michael not to go, responds, "It's no use. He doesn't hear a word we're saying" (p. 230). Michael's decision "to join the French" disrupts the psychic patterns of family life (p. 230). His political devotion follows channels carved by the currents of unreconstructed Oedipal desire, leading him to reject the social norms of language and conduct which identification with paternal authority would enforce.

The Oedipal devotion-unto-death of the son toward the highly idealized mother, then, is the family romance through which *Cathleen ni Houlihan* presents its allegory of Irish nationality. That particular romance strikes a wide range of resonances within contemporary Irish culture. Not only does it play on whatever tendency toward such Oedipal devotion may have existed in actual families, but it also draws on the strong Catholic traditions of Mariolatry and martyrdom which had become crucial to the political strategies and ideologies of Irish nationalism. And it combines these elements with an appeal to Irish legend, implicit in the figure of Cathleen "for whom," Yeats writes, "so many songs have been sung and so many stories have been told" [p. 232]), and an invocation of an explosive revolutionary crisis—the 1798 rebellion.

In the context of the play's original production in 1902, this combination of elements forms an extremely powerful nationalist allegory. Appearing during the doldrum-period of Irish parliamentary nationalism after the death of Parnell, the play appeals not to negotiation or even covert subversion as means of attaining definite political goals, but rather to violent rebellion in the service of a transcendent spiritual ideal of nationality. Though the play's allegory is certainly flexible enough to be pressed into support of a variety of nationalist ideologies, the situation presented by its family romance, the situation of risking death to realize a perhaps impossible ideal, could certainly catalyze those forces frustrated with the apparent failure of parliamentary nationalist strategies. Stephen Gwynn's reaction to seeing one of the play's first performances—with Maud Gonne in the title role—confirms this idea: "The effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot."<sup>4</sup> And Gwynn's thought crops up much later in Yeats's own famous question in "The Old Man and the Echo" (1938): "Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?"<sup>5</sup>

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To measure the precise effect of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* on the nationalist movement is, of course, impossible. But the importance of the play's family romance to nationalist ideology is certainly confirmed by that romance's reappearance in key works of one of the movement's central figures: Patrick Pearse. Two of Pearse's most famous poems are written in the voices of mothers who clearly represent Ireland. One of these is "The Mother," which Pearse wrote, in a death cell in Kilmainham Prison within an hour of his execution, at his mother's request: "You asked me," he says in his last letter to her, "to write a little poem which would seem to be said by you about me."<sup>6</sup> This poem's first seven lines closely echo a speech by the Cathleen of Yeats's play:

**CATHLEEN NI HOULIHAN:** It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red-cheeked will be pale-cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken. . . . They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake, and for all that, they will think they are well paid.

They shall be remembered for ever,  
They shall be alive for ever,  
They shall be speaking for ever,  
The people shall hear them for ever.      (p. 229)

**"THE MOTHER":**

I do not grudge them: Lord, I do not grudge  
My two strong sons that I have seen go out  
To break their strength and die, they and a few,  
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,  
They shall be spoken of among their people,  
The generations shall remember them,  
And call them blessed;<sup>7</sup>

Cathleen declares that those who serve her will face death and exile, but that they will be remembered for those sacrifices; the Mother says virtually the same thing: "The generations shall remember" her sons because of the cause—"the glorious thing"—for which they die. The echoes between these passages suggest that the family romance of the idealized mother whose sons-lovers die for her plays a central role in nationalist representations of Ireland. And the second of Pearse's poems—"I Am Ireland"—confirms this suggestion with an even more explicit identification of the nation as idealized mother:

I am Ireland:  
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.

Great my glory:

I that bore Cuchulain the valiant.

Great my shame:  
My children that sold their own mother.

I am Ireland:  
I am older than the Old Woman of Beare.<sup>8</sup>

This poem, with its severely symmetrical opposition between the "glory" of "Cuchulain the valiant" and the "shame" of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla—"the children that sold their own mother" (the lovers who brought the Normans to Ireland and so began the 700 years of English domination)—poses again the choice between nationalist devotion and sexual love in terms even more stark and uncompromising than those of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. It also partially assimilates the figures of Cuchulain, Diarmuid, and Dervorgilla into Christian mythology: when the speaker of the poem—"Ireland"—says that she "bore" Cuchulain, she recalls the relation of the Virgin to Christ; and when she refers to the "children that sold" her, she alludes to Judas. The poem thus draws on the resources of both Irish legend and Catholic religious tradition in elaborating its image of Ireland as a mother and in forging its opposition between devotion to that mother and the temptations of sexual love. When Ireland speaks in Pearse's poetry, then, it speaks in the voice of a mother whose endless sufferings, springing from persecution of her nationality and religion, command her sons' devotion, a voice which could easily be that of the Cathleen ni Houlihan of Yeats's play. Both of the poems cited here present condensed versions of that play's national allegory. And both thus testify to the mythic power of that play's family romance within Irish nationalist ideology.

By alluding to Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, however, "I Am Ireland" not only condemns the original betrayal of Irish nationality, but also, in spite of its own explicit polemic, raises the specter of a national allegory radically different from that of *Cathleen ni Houlihan*: a national allegory centering not on devotion to a spiritual ideal of nationality, but on struggle with a violent and shameful memory of complicity in colonialist domination. It calls to mind, that is, the national allegory of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, a play which can be read as an extended commentary upon Pearse's allusion and as Yeats's most sustained response to the allegory he had proposed in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. Focusing on Diarmuid and Dervorgilla rather than Cathleen ni Houlihan as spiritual figures for Ireland, this play proposes a critical

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rather than an idealistic allegory of Irish nationality, and its family romance explores, in psychic terms, the historical roots of the earlier play's idealistic devotion.

In the family romance of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, Diarmuid and Dervorgilla take the roles not of children, as in Pearse's poem, but of parents. Their parental role is defined through the various relations of kinship and descent the play sets up between them and the Young Man. One such relation is established through the action of the play, in which the lovers guide the Young Man along "the pathways that the sheep tread out" to the mountain where he is to await the "Aran coracle" in which he will make his escape (pp. 765, 764). The lovers' guiding role places them in a distinctly parental position, a position of kinship the Young Man himself acknowledges when he explains their trustworthiness by saying that ghosts whose

blood has returned to fields  
That have grown red from drinking blood like mine,  
. . . would not if they could betray.  
(p. 766)

Not only do the ghosts assume a guiding, parental role in their relation with the Young Man, but their blood mixes with blood like his in the Irish fields, establishing a kinship of common blood and common soil.

Another familial link that binds the lovers and the Young Man is their shared ghostliness. The Young Man, like the lovers, moves about by night and shuns human contact. And the exile he faces is a condition similar to the purgatorial afterlife of the lovers, in which they "live through their old lives again" (p. 766). The Young Man's ghostliness in his flight is confirmed in the first stanza of the play's central song:

Why should the heart take flight?  
What sets it beating so?  
The bitter sweetness of the night  
Has made it but a lonely thing.  
(p. 767)

This stanza not only defines the ghosts' contradictory situation, the "bitter sweetness" of their unconsummated passion and united loneliness, but also, as Helen Vendler notes, "approximates the young man's feelings . . . he experiences in his flight a loneliness akin to the solitude of the shades."<sup>9</sup>

The song's second and third stanzas suggest that the Young Man and the ghosts also share a similar attitude toward the acts which necessitate their night-wandering:

My head is in a cloud;  
 I'd let the whole world go;  
 My rascal heart is proud  
 Remembering and remembering.

The dreaming bones cry out  
 Because the night winds blow  
 And heaven's a cloudy blot.  
 Calamity can have its fling.

(pp. 767–68)

Just as the Young Man has staked all—"the whole world"—on a single act of which his rebellious "rascal heart" is proud, so the lovers' rascal hearts seem to remain proud of the act to which their passion drove them. The Young Girl rejects the Young Man's guess that the ghostly lovers are "angry" and so "wander in a wilful solitude" by replying that "These have no thought but love" (p. 771); the ghosts, that is, remain unswayed from their passion even after seven centuries of purgatorial expiation, even though, unlike ghosts of "common sinners," "These are alone, / Being accursed" (pp. 769, 770). This shared pride, this surrender to the inclinations of the "rascal heart" unrestrained by the beclouded head, is what leads both the Young Man and the lovers to the point of letting calamity "have its fling." In both cases, then, the "rascal heart" produces historical calamity: the 700 years of English rule, the Rising and its bloody aftermath (which, though Yeats could not know this in 1917, would eventually lead to Ireland's independence).<sup>10</sup>

The close connection between these two calamities, the first resulting from the lovers' act, the second from the Young Man's, drives home yet again the familial relation's importance in the play. The Young Man's act, figuratively speaking, *descends* from that of the lovers. As Peter Ure puts it, the ghosts "fathered" the Young Man: "he is one of the consequences of their transgression. . . ."<sup>11</sup> The Young Girl makes this connection explicit when she says that "Until this hour no ghost or living man" has spoken to the lovers and that their deliverance depends on finding "somebody of their race" who "at last would say, / 'I have forgiven them'" (pp. 770, 773). The many qualities the Young Man shares with the lovers—his willingness to sacrifice himself to the dictates of his "rascal heart," his lack of remorse for the consequences of his acts, and his fugitive's ghostliness—all mark him as someone of the lovers' race. And their choosing him as the first ghost or living man to speak to them certainly indicates that they feel some bond of kinship with him.

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The situation of parental figures asking forgiveness of their son for an amorous act, a forgiveness that will allow them to consummate their passion once more, indicates that this play's family romance follows the pattern of a "primal scene" in which a child witnesses a sexual act between his parents and interprets (to cite Freud) "the act of love as an act of violence," refusing to acknowledge that through this act he himself was engendered.<sup>12</sup> The Young Man conceives of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla in precisely this way. He immediately associates these lovers and their act not only with the twelfth-century Norman invasion, but also with the present-day violence visible in the panorama they show him of the West of Ireland landscape:

I can see

The Aran Islands, Connemara Hills,  
 And Galway in the breaking light; there too  
 The enemy has toppled roof and gable,  
 And torn the panelling from ancient rooms;  
 What generations of old men had known  
 Like their own hands, and children wondered at,  
 Has boiled a trooper's porridge. That town had lain,  
 But for the part that you would have me pardon,  
 Amid its gables and battlements  
 Like any old admired Italian town;

. . . . .

Our country, if that crime were uncommitted,  
 Had been most beautiful.

(pp. 773-74)

Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's love, according to the Young Man, is synonymous not simply with a single act of political violence, but with the whole chain of violent acts by which English colonial rule had been maintained. "All the ruin" he sees is "their handiwork" (p. 774). Their love is the primal "crime" which determines the course of Irish history (p. 772); it is the fall into colonial domination. The memory of that crime, like the memory of a primal scene of parental intercourse, recalls an origin which the descendant would prefer to deny, an origin which the Young Man devotes himself to negating both through his participation in the Rising and through a repression central to the ideology of idealistic nationalism.

This repression manifests itself in his responses both to the lovers and to analogous figures in Irish history. At every mention of an Irish figure who has opposed or weakened the nationalist cause, the Young Man responds with a denial of kinship, a denial rooted in his repression of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's originary crime. When he speaks of

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Irishmen who serve the English in the present war, for example, he shows a hatred much stronger than his hostility toward the English themselves:

## In the late Rising

I think there was no man of us but hated  
To fire at soldiers who but did their duty  
And were not of our race, but when a man  
Is born in Ireland and of Irish stock,  
When he takes part against us—

(p. 765)

And when the Stranger mentions Donough O'Brien, a fourteenth-century nobleman who may have invited the Scots to aid in his rebellion, the Young Man issues a denial of kinship meant to endure even beyond death:

It was men like Donough who made Ireland weak—  
My curse on all that troop, and when I die  
I'll leave my body, if I have any choice,  
Far from his ivy-tod and his owl.

(p. 769)

The paradigmatic example of these denials, of course, is the Young Man's refusal to forgive the lovers: "O, never, never / Shall Diarmuid and Dervorgilla be forgiven" (p. 773). This refusal to forgive is essentially a refusal to acknowledge the similarities between the lovers' crime and the Young Man's own acts of impassioned political violence in the Rising, the similarities we have already seen defined in the play's songs. It is also a refusal to allow a consummation of the lovers' passion in a kiss, a refusal to acknowledge that the sexual passion that led to their crime could be anything other than an act of violence. And finally, it is a denial of the Young Man's own origins in the lovers' act, a denial of the lovers' ancestral or parental relation to him.

That this refusal indeed constitutes a repression becomes clear when, just after the Young Man pronounces it, the lovers disappear:

A cloud floats up  
And covers all the mountain-head in a moment;  
And now it lifts and they are swept away.

(p. 775)

The refusal, the disappearance of the lovers, and daybreak all occur in the same moments, as if to suggest that the Young Man is emerging via an effort of repression from the nighttime journey into the historical unconscious he has made in the course of the play. And this effort of repression is a difficult one; the Young Man must state his refusal to forgive three times, and his last words acknowledge the lovers'

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persuasive power: "I had almost yielded and forgiven it all— / Terrible  
the temptation and the place!" (p. 775).

The Young Man's effort of repression, his denial of the lovers' parental relation to him, perfectly complements Michael Gillane's Oedipal devotion to the Poor Old Woman in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. By combining the psychic situations of the two plays, one can construct a single family romance in which the repression of the primal scene of parental intercourse results in an idealization of one parent—the mother, Cathleen ni Houlihan—and hostility toward the other—the father, John Bull. The child who witnesses a primal scene, according to Freud, is likely to interpret it not only as an act of violence, but as an act of subjugation.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation combines with Oedipal wish fulfillment to construct the family romance of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* out of that of *The Dreaming of the Bones*. Rejecting the complicity of both parents in the sexual/violent act, the son assigns the role of perpetrator to the father he rebels against and the role of innocent victim to the mother he desires. The combination of these family romances, then, provides a map of the psychic paths a Young Man follows in committing himself to an idealistic nationalist ideology. To repress the memory of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla's act, to deny kinship with them, is to repress the memory of Irish complicity in English colonization and domination. And that repression enables the construction of an ideal of Ireland utterly unified in its opposition to England, the ideal Cathleen ni Houlihan represents.

In writing *The Dreaming of the Bones* as a response to the Rising which *Cathleen ni Houlihan* may have helped to inspire, Yeats is exploring the repressed subtext of his earlier play. He is exploring the historical and political contradictions which motivate the earlier play's idealistic nationalism. In order to effect this exploration he replaces the earlier play's family romance, a romance centering on a fantasized fulfillment of Oedipal desire, with a romance centering on the troublesome memory of a real event which takes the pattern of a primal scene. And that memory emerges from the unconscious at the moment when the Young Man's idealism is put to its hardest test—the moment when his rebellion has failed. His steadfast refusal to forgive the lovers is shown to be an idealistic denial of the bonds that indissolubly link Ireland's history to England's, bonds established in part through the Irish lovers' complicity, bonds which have shaped many facets of the Young Man's own culture. To deny those bonds, to declare, as the Old Woman does in the earlier play, that the English are simply "strangers in the house," may be the only way to end the oppression that has

historically accompanied them; but that denial is also a refusal to recognize that those strangers came into the house in part by invitation and that a 700-year-old residence must inevitably erode easy distinctions between stranger and familiar.

*The Dreaming of the Bones*, then, does not simply condemn the Young Man's idealistic nationalism, though it by no means echoes the ringing endorsement of that ideology Yeats had earlier offered in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.<sup>14</sup> Even while recognizing the revolutionary potential of that idealistic nationalism, rather, the later play criticizes its refusal to acknowledge that the conflicts between Ireland and England are mirrored by conflicts within Ireland itself. It criticizes, that is, a central tenet of the ideology mythologized in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, in the poems of Pearse, and even in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic which Pearse read on the steps of the General Post Office on Easter Monday, 1916: "The Republic," according to that document, ". . . declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the nation and all of its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences fostered by an alien government."<sup>15</sup> Representing Ireland as the mother of a unified national family in its reference to "the children of the nation," and assigning responsibility for Ireland's internal differences to "an alien government," this proclamation sums up very concisely the ideology which guided many of the participants in the Rising. But as *The Dreaming of the Bones* suggests, the Irish national family was by no means wholly united, nor were its internal divisions wholly assignable to external causes. And as the last stanza of the play's song implies, the violence unleashed by that Proclamation might provoke a wider "calamity" than its authors imagined (as was the case with the violence instigated by Diarmuid and Dervorgilla):

My heart ran wild when it heard  
 The curlew cry before dawn  
 And the eddying cat-headed bird;  
 But now the night is gone.  
 I have heard from far below  
 The strong March birds a-crow.  
 Stretch neck and clap the wing  
 Red cocks, and crow!

(p. 776)

This song refers not only to the violence attendant upon the sexual "crime" of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla, upon the nighttime running wild of their hearts, but also to the violence sparked by the Young Man's

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refusal to make peace with either the present or the past. The apocalyptic cries of the "Red cocks" invoke a generalized violence,<sup>16</sup> a violence not limited by distinctions between anticolonial and civil war, a violence that operates on both psychic and social levels. *The Dreaming of the Bones* offers no explicit condemnation of that violence or of its perpetrators. But it does criticize the limits of an ideological position which refuses to acknowledge the internal conflicts in which violence might flare.

This critique is elaborated not only through the substitution of Diarmuid and Dervorgilla for Cathleen and of the Young Man's memory of a primal scene for Michael Gillane's Oedipal devotion, but also through a set of internalizations. First, there is the thematic/political internalization I have just defined, the shift of focus from the conflict between England and Ireland to that within Ireland itself. Second, there is an internalization of dramatic situation: while much of the action of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* involves relations between a set of living characters, virtually the entire action of *The Dreaming of the Bones* seems to occur within the Young Man's psyche. Third, there is an internalization of dramatic setting and technique: while *Cathleen ni Houlihan* calls for a realistic setting which will create the illusion of action taking place in the external world, *The Dreaming of the Bones*, one of the first of Yeats's Noh-inspired plays, dispenses with virtually all realistic or illusionistic trappings, explicitly defining itself as a symbolic representation of internal experience.

These internalizations suggest that the critique *The Dreaming of the Bones* proposes applies not only to the idealist ideology represented in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, but also to the very means of representation. The irruption of the highly idealized, phantasmal Cathleen in the realistically presented social world of the earlier play makes claims both for the simplicity and transparency of political commitments and for the enduring and transformative power of a transcendent spiritual ideal of nationality even (or especially) in hostile circumstances. The explicitly fantastic apparition of the ghosts in the netherworld scene of *The Dreaming of the Bones*, in contrast, suggests that the political motives of a young man's behavior are charged with contradiction and repression, rooted in forces he may not fully comprehend, and that his ideals may stem from a denial of ancestral crimes or complicities. The ghosts challenge not only the Young Man's idealistic nationalism, but also the conventional notions of political motivations and mythologizing on which that nationalism draws. The "Dry bones" that "dream and darken"

"our sun" must also darken stage, situation, and psyche in order to show clearly the conflicts from which their dreams spring (p. 776).

<sup>1</sup> W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> W. B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 231. All subsequent quotations from Yeats's plays will be taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of this resolution, see Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth, 1953-73), XIX, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in A. Norman Jeffares and A. N. Rosenthal, *A Commentary on the Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> W. B. Yeats, *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 632.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Pearse, *The Letters of P. H. Pearse*, ed. Seamas O Buachalla (Gerards Cross, Bucks.: Colin Smythe, 1980), p. 381.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Pearse, *The Collected Works of Padraig H. Pearse*, 2 vols. (Dublin: Phoenix, n.d.), I, 333.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 323.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Vendler, *Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Yeats confirms that the play was written during 1917 in a letter to Lady Gregory (see *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade [London: Hart-Davis, 1954], p. 626).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Ure, *Yeats the Playwright* (London: Routledge, 1963), pp. 96-97.

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children," in *The Standard Edition*, IX, 221.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, in *The Standard Edition*, XVI, 318.

<sup>14</sup> My reading of the Young Man's refusal, though stated in more explicitly political terms, follows the general outlines of that proposed by Leonard Nathan, who argues: "As the young Revolutionist is not roused by the daemonic spirits to tragic choice, so Ireland fails . . . to accept the 'curse' that would ultimately bring it Unity of Being through tragic experience" (Leonard Nathan, *The Tragic Drama of W. B. Yeats* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965], p. 211). His refusal, in other words, is both inevitable and tragic, given Ireland's history as a colony. Significant opponents of this reading include F. A. C. Wilson, who claims that the "lovers ought for aesthetic reasons to have been absolved" (F. A. C. Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography* [New York: Macmillan, 1960], p. 240); David R. Clark, who argues that when the Young Man is asked to forgive the lovers, he "is being tempted to fail to see Ireland before him at all times, to overlook the crimes against her" (David R. Clark, *W. B. Yeats and the Theatre of Desolate Reality* [Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1965], p. 55); and Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler, both of whom assert that the play's political setting is, to quote Bloom, "gratuitous" (Harold Bloom, *Yeats* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970], p. 308; Vendler, *Yeats's Vision and the Later Plays*, p. 187).

<sup>15</sup> Proclamation of "The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to

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the People of Ireland," in 1916: *The Easter Rising*, ed. O. Dudley Edwards and Fergus Pyle (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1968), p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> F. A. C. Wilson points out that the red March cock "is the red symbolic bird of Mars, regent of war and in Yeats's system . . . of the first bloody phases of a new historical cycle. . . . Yeats expected the 'cycle of freedom' to begin with world-wide wars—Involving among other things the liberation of Ireland—at a full moon in March, the month of Mars; nor will it have escaped his notice that the Easter Rising of 1916 came almost exactly at this time . . ." (Wilson, *Yeats's Iconography*, pp. 236–37).

# Zulfikar Ghose:

## An Interview

C. KANAGANAYAKAM

Despite two decades of sustained literary activity, Zulfikar Ghose continues to remain relatively unknown in academic circles, hardly discussed in literary journals, and only tenuously linked to Commonwealth, British, and American writing. His refusal to be circumscribed by national boundaries and "ethnic flavor," his willingness to experiment with new modes, and his propensity to create antireferential and "difficult" works may partly explain his consignment to that area of gray where neither the student nor the literary critic wishes to wander. Neither mediocre nor an obscurantist, Ghose has at least three major claims to recognition: firstly, his writings, despite their differences in narrative mode and style, possess a remarkable unity; secondly, his works reveal a complexity of texture and depth of imagination which make him a contemporary writer worthy of serious attention; thirdly, the patterns of quest he demonstrates through his fiction could offer in the future the possibility of a new poetics for the literature of native-alien experience.

The bulk of Ghose's writing is so far removed from his biographical circumstances that the reader often fails to recognize how dependent one is on the other. In fact, in order to arrive at a unified vision of his writings it is necessary to turn to biography and history, to the crucial years before and after the Independence and Partition of India, the years in which Ghose learned to love and hate the country, and to recognize his predicament as an alien in the land of his birth.

Ghose was born in 1935, and his first seven years were spent in Sialkot (a city in East Punjab, close to the Indo-Pakistani border, which became part of West Pakistan after the Partition of India in 1947), in relatively prosperous circumstances, in the midst of an extended family.

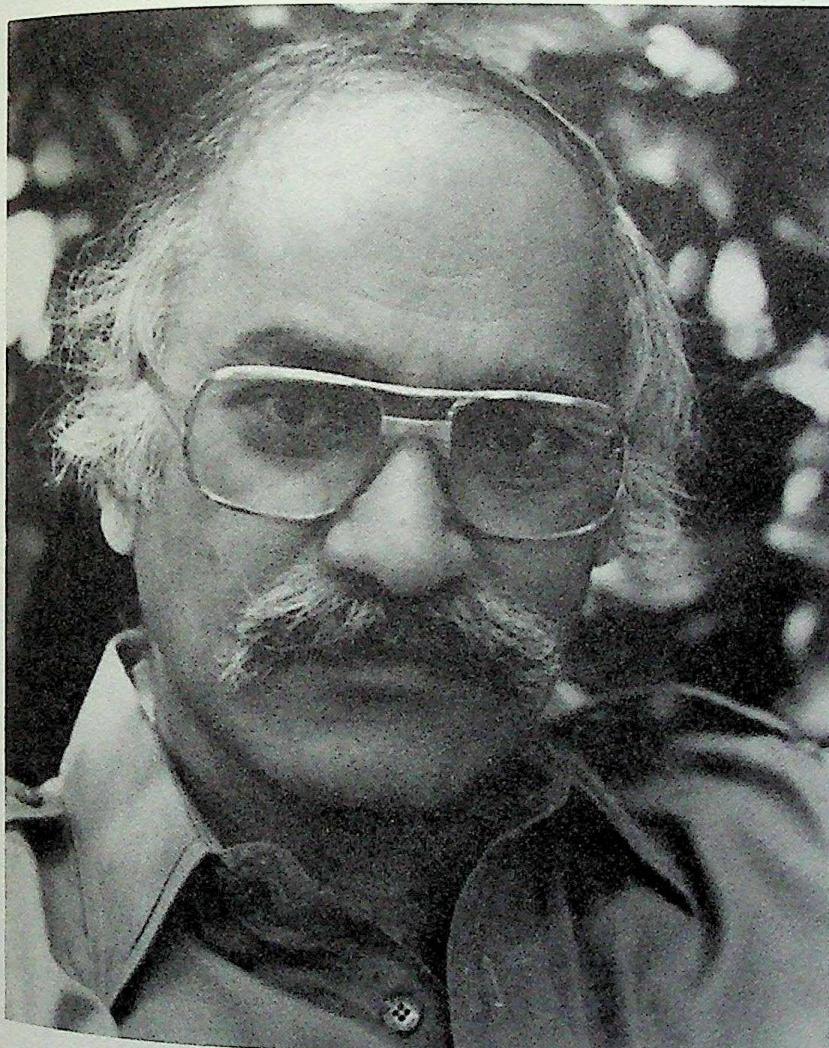
Ghose remembers that "several generations of a family lived and spawned in the same house" which, despite the irony, suggests a strong sense of continuity. Sialkot in the 1930s was an industrial city, which the author remembers as an organic community untouched by modernization and held together by shared values. In contrast to this period, the next ten years—1942 to 1952—were spent in Bombay, which was at that time, as it is now, a metropolitan, predominantly Hindu city. The ten years coincided with the last days of the British Raj, and with the possibility of Independence and Partition in the near future. The Hindus and the Muslims, who had lived for centuries in perfect harmony, were beginning to slaughter each other on a massive scale. For Ghose, a Muslim in a Hindu city, this was a period of fear and uncertainty, of growing awareness of his predicament as a native-alien, of a realization that India was no longer his home.

In 1952 Ghose sailed to England, where he spent the next seventeen years. Life in England hardly resolved his personal dilemma, but it did prove productive in many ways. He studied at Sloane School, Chelsea, graduated from the University of Keele in 1959, edited *Universities' Poetry*, worked as a correspondent for the *Observer*, wrote reviews for the *Western Daily Press*, the *Guardian*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*, served as a teacher, came into contact with several members of the Group, and published two collections of poems—*The Loss of India* (1964) and *Jets from Orange* (1967)—an autobiography, a collection of short stories with B. S. Johnson—*Statement against Corpses* (1965)—and two novels—*The Contradictions* (1966) and *The Murder of Aziz Khan* (1967).

Having spent seventeen years in England (interestingly, he spent the same number of years in India), he emigrated to the United States in 1969 to take up a teaching appointment at the University of Texas at Austin. The last seventeen years, from 1969 to 1986, have been crucial ones, during which he has read widely and published seven novels: *The Native* (1972), *The Beautiful Empire* (1975), *A Different World* (1978), *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script* (1981), *A New History of Torments* (1982), *Don Bueno* (1983), and *Figures of Enchantment* (1986). He also produced two volumes of poetry—*The Violent West* (1972) and *A Memory of Asia* (1984)—two critical works—*Hamlet, Prufrock and Language* (1978) and *The Fiction of Reality* (1984)—and several uncollected essays, poems, and short stories.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes the reader is that Ghose's life and his movement from India to England and Texas have little bearing on his literary works. Most Commonwealth writers who have dealt with the problem of identity and exile have done so by re-creating in their

art a realistic or sentimentalized version of the land of their birth. They have felt a need to create a model of what they have left behind or lost in order to explore the possibility of creating a new identity. In Ghose's early works a correspondence along these lines could be established, but as he moves increasingly into antireferential writing, the continuities, though still present, become progressively difficult to detect.



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Nevertheless, one needs to be aware that Ghose's changes in narrative mode—mimesis, stream of consciousness, picaresque, metafiction, and magic realism—are not the result of technical legerdemain so

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much as a consequence of the complex perception of exile. As Ghose moves from one mode to another his vision changes from displacement in a referential sense to homelessness in a philosophical sense. Inevitably this leads to a mode of writing which relies increasingly on the imagination to create its artifacts. Thus location, whether it is the Texas of *Hulme's Investigations* or the Spanish America of *Don Bueno*, becomes secondary to the fictionality of the text.

That Ghose's consciousness of native-alien experience, combined with a growing loss of contact with the historical circumstances of exile, should result in a mode of writing which is both experimental and antireferential is not surprising. The imagination that grasps and records the objective world is also inspired by the conception of home that could only be realized in art. As Ghose puts it, "one entertains / the certainty of a world that's undeniably not there" (*A Memory of Asia*, p. 30). In other words, the more philosophical a writer becomes in his awareness of marginalization, the more nonrealistic and experimental his writing is likely to become.

The "difficulty" or obscurity confronting the reader of Ghose's works disappears when he recognizes the philosophical underpinning that unites the author's writing. The idea of home, whether it appears as a farm, a ranch, a man-made paradise, or an Arcadian village, remains a central preoccupation and a unifying force. In the author's words: "I want to see again what I have seen to confirm former convictions and to know that a certain vision is a continuing truth" (*A Memory of Asia*, p. 29). And different narrative modes, with their diverse locations and characters, are multiple ways of attempting to resolve the artistic quest for "home." The quest is a never-ending one in that the objective conditions which generate it are irreversible, but the irreversibility of the predicament of exile does not sterilize creativity; instead, it opens up new possibilities.

Thus, to limit Ghose, whose sensibility is an evolving one, to a preconceived taxonomy would be both futile and frustrating. On the other hand, to recognize the thematic unity which underlies all his writings is not only to understand the diversity and complexity of the works themselves, but also to speculate on the possibility of a new poetics for the literature of native-alien experience.

The following interview with Zulfikar Ghose took place on August 14, 1984, at the University of Texas at Austin.

*K:* I have been interested in the wide range of forms you have used in your fiction and in the relation between form and idea. You have been

moving from one form to another, and that appears to be a crucial aspect of your work. *Don Bueno*, for instance, is not like *The Murder of Aziz Khan*.

G: No, not at all. This might become clear if I retrace the history that led to the writing of *Aziz Khan*.

Except for some occasional pieces of prose, I wrote nothing but poems as an undergraduate at Keele University—I was there from 1955 to 1959—and I had the expectation at that time that I would continue to write poems and that one day I would be a poet of some worth. When I came down from Keele, I was involved with a group of writers in London, all of them poets. In my last year at Keele, I had undertaken to edit *Universities' Poetry*, and had invited Anthony Smith at Cambridge, John Fuller at Oxford, and B. S. Johnson in London to be my coeditors, and the four of us began to meet in London in the summer of 1959. Fuller faded away, but Smith and Johnson became my close friends. We met often, wrote letters, showed one another our poems, talked endlessly of poetry. Then, through Smith, I became associated with the Group which met on Friday nights at Edward Lucie-Smith's house; the next wave of British poets came from the Group—Peter Redgrove, George MacBeth, Peter Porter, several others. At the same time, I became associated with Howard Sergeant, who ran monthly poetry readings at a pub in Dulwich, and with Martin Bax, who edited *Ambit*. In short, every aspect of my literary life centered on poetry.

B. S. Johnson became my closest friend and although he was to make his name as a novelist, he called himself a poet, even described himself as such in his passport. We were all poets in those days. Anthony Smith went to Bristol, where he began to edit the arts page of the *Western Daily Press* and made me his chief reviewer. That is when I began to read a lot of new novels. During these years, 1961 to 1966, I also reviewed occasionally in the *TLS* and the *Guardian* and one or two other places. I read an enormous number of new novels, and most of them were abominably bad. The moment had to come when I thought, Good God, how can anyone publish this kind of trash? And naturally the next idea that comes to you is that you can do it better, and before you know it you are sitting down and writing a novel. In those circumstances, and at that age, one is possessed by the anxiety to impress the world with one's brilliance. And so I concocted the novel called *The Contradictions*. Of course, I had no experience of writing fiction, I had very little reading of serious fiction behind me.

K: But you did some reading of fiction for your degree?

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G: I took George Eliot as a special subject and her novels were the only ones I read for my degree. There were huge gaps in my reading. I had not read Joyce, Beckett, or Sterne. I had read little Dickens and hardly any James. I had not discovered Chekhov, Balzac, or Flaubert, without whom I do not think it is possible to write fiction. So, my first novel was written out of horrible ignorance. When Macmillan published it, I was distressed to appear in the world with such an inferior work and resolved to make amends by writing a solid, straightforward novel before allowing myself the indulgence of attempting experimental fiction. That is why I wrote *The Murder of Aziz Khan*.

This was the time when the *nouveau roman* was making its mark—Robbe-Grillet, Claude Simon, etc., were being translated into English. I did not read any of them at the time, in fact I did not come to them till the 1970s. However, it was a climate in which the new was being valued and I was attracted to it. I already had notions of new forms but I deliberately sat down for a couple of years and did this solid thing, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*. When I finished it, I thought it solid enough, but a form in which I would not wish to work again. Having proved that I could write the traditional novel, I turned to what interested my imagination, I wrote *Crump's Terms*.

K: Did this mean that you were disappointed with *The Contradictions* or was it the publishers . . . ?

G: No, nothing to do with the publishers. I was disappointed with *The Contradictions*. I think it is a terrible piece of writing. I don't know why but I can't bear to read any of my work again. I keep it in front of me to remind myself that I have not done too well and I ought to do better.

But to go on with my narrative: I became a schoolteacher in London in 1963, I got married in 1964, and *Crump's Terms* was begun in 1967. By then, I was sufficiently affluent in a lower-middle-class kind of way to own my car and to drive off to Europe every summer with my wife. At that time I was conscious of the decadence that was settling over Europe. The 1960s were a time of the coming of the Beatles, the coming of an intense popular culture, and, above all, the adoration of popular culture by the intellectuals. It was smart to be praising something that was of passing interest. I felt rather disgruntled by the degeneration around me and began to withdraw into myself. *Crump's Terms* formulated itself in that context.

When I first wrote *Crump's Terms*, I had not read a single work by Robbe-Grillet, nor any Beckett. *Crump's Terms* remained unpublished for eight years during which time I did read Robbe-Grillet and Beckett,

and some of their influence must have come in when I revised the novel, but actually the final version is not very different from the first complete draft. I seem to have discovered their preoccupations as my own even before I read them.

K: But at that time you had read writers like Virginia Woolf?

G: No, I had not read anything by Virginia Woolf, except *A Room of One's Own*, which I had read as a schoolboy. But I had not read *Mrs. Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*.

K: How about Joyce?

G: Yes, I had read Joyce. I wrote *Crump's Terms* after my first visit to Brazil and I took *Ulysses* to Brazil and read it while I was there. So, I had read Joyce. I think some of those compound words and neologisms in *Crump's Terms* are influenced by Joyce.

K: How about Faulkner? He uses the technique of repetition.

G: Yes, Faulkner is perhaps unconsciously there because I had read Faulkner ardently as an undergraduate.

What happened to *Crump's Terms* was that when I finished it in 1968 and sent it to Macmillan, they rejected it. Several other publishers rejected it, too, and when I came to the States in 1969 I brought it with me and spent another six months or so rewriting it. I wrote about three or four drafts of it and sent it back to the agent. He submitted it to a number of publishers and they all rejected it. Nobody wanted it. Everybody said I was wasting my time. Then it was finally accepted by Macmillan because I offered them the Brazilian trilogy. The trilogy had what seemed a commercial prospect and Macmillan hoped to make a lot of money with it. I made the acceptance of *Crump's Terms* a condition of giving them the trilogy.

K: But you did not consider *Crump's Terms* an inferior work, did you?

G: No, I thought that was the direction I should be taking. If Macmillan had accepted it in 1968 when it was first offered to them, I would have progressed from there instead of spending the next eight years on the Brazilian trilogy. Who knows what I might not have discovered? The trilogy was amusing to write but it did not involve me in artistic growth. I suppose I began writing *Hulme's Investigations* before finishing the trilogy in order to console myself that I was not merely the writer of commercial fiction.

K: But you did not think of going back to the Aziz Khan style?

G: Never. Once that was done it was done. One changes, one's point of view is constantly moving into new regions. Experience is a comprehension of a previously obscure form: a novel begins because I do not see and it ends because, and only if, I have seen.

You know there is a plot or a story in a novel. Something is going on. All that is made up to keep the writing going. My own interest is in something else. There is an imagery going on. There are characters talking to each other, and so on. These are simply diversions. The real thing is going on somewhere else, in the language itself. I aim for an accumulation of brilliant details to get to that language. The most important thing in writing fiction is what Conrad calls the shape and ring of sentences. I don't know whether you've noticed I sometimes tend to write very long and complicated sentences, a Proustian kind of sentence, filled with vivid matter until the language releases a subtle thought. It doesn't always work, no thought might emerge at the end, but at least there will be a richness of texture, a pleasing cadence.

K: But unless you have various dimensions of experience which must come through in the language you wouldn't have an interest in constructing such sentences.

G: As soon as you use words you are referring to reality; indeed, there is no reality outside language that can be said to have a meaning; and it must follow that you cannot perceive a complex reality without creating a complex language. Flaubert put this precisely when he said that style is a manner of seeing things. He also said that he wished to write about nothing, a book about nothing that was held together only by its style. He said that in the context of writing *Madame Bovary*, and of course he did not succeed in writing about nothing. But it seems to me that subsequent generations of French writers, especially Raymond Rousell, have come very close to writing about nothing.

The difference I am trying to get at is that if one were to sit down and say, I am going to write a novel called *The Incredible Brazilian* for which I will draw upon history and some of my own experiences, then one would write a novel with a largely predetermined subject matter. Contrast to that the writing of *Hulme's Investigations into the Bogart Script*, which is composed without any preoccupation with subject matter. I find it much more interesting to write the latter kind of novel; in it I record not a perceived world but create perception of the world. Of course, the perception is not going to be empty of matter. In the act of creating a language, inventing a form, shaping a style for such a novel one is engaged in a simultaneous attention to multiple factors; you

concentrate on the sentence but your memories, background, reading, experience, everything that constitutes your identity charge that sentence with a current that comes out of your unconscious mind.

Hulme's *Investigations into the Bogart Script* began by itself. I just found myself writing it one day. I soon realized that what I was trying to produce was a text which was simply a structure of language, which was not based on preconceived ideas, which was not trying to put forward the writer's views, which did not have a story or plot, but which was still fiction. As with *Crump's Terms*, it was universally rejected when it was offered to publishers.

K: This was in the early Seventies?

G: Yes, this was in the early Seventies. I rewrote it a number of times. It went on from 1972 to 1978 while I was writing *A Different World* and *Hamlet, Prufrock and Language*. Finally, however, a small press in Austin, Texas, published it.

K: So the order of composition has been quite different from the order of publication?

G: Yes. Unfortunately it takes publishers years to respond to a work of the imagination. Sometimes even when they like it, they reject it because they have convinced themselves in advance that it won't sell.

I seem to be giving you an intellectual and chronological biography and I might as well finish it.

K: You have left out your collection of poems.

G: We will come to the poems later perhaps, because we now come to the more recent novels *A New History of Torments* and *Don Bueno*. These are set in Spanish South America, though there are a few pages of *Don Bueno* set in Brazil. But actually the setting has nothing whatsoever to do with anything. With these novels, I entered a phase of pure invention. There are images in them that come from direct observation. The Equator, the Andes, the Amazon. But I am not concerned in them with common reality. I create the illusion of reality when in fact I have no reality at all, except that of the imagination.

K: But not in the manner of Hulme's *Investigations*?

G: No, not in the manner of *Hulme's Investigations* because the intellectual grasp behind these two novels is different. I am no longer talking in these novels about language but about human experience.

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K: So you did conform to a linear movement and realistic framework in certain ways.

G: Yes, there is a linear narrative and the pretense of reality. The pretense of reality is carefully maintained, but if you read carefully you will probably find out that it is flawed.

K: Yes, there is a strong element of artifice.

G: Yes.

K: But both seem to coexist in a way—the artifice and the reality.

G: Well, I hope so. The thinking that was going on in my mind had to do with the recurrence of myth in human experience. I sometimes wonder whether we are not driven by a mechanism in our brains which contains memories not our own but of the human tribe, memories that compel an unpredictable behavior. Call these memories the recurrence of myth, a force that respects neither time nor place, but is universally present in the human psyche. It strikes me that these memories are partial memories because with the passage of time many of these images have become eroded, confused, and distorted, the original myth has become surreal. Our actions are charged by the force of compulsions unknown to our conscious minds, and those mythical elements recurring in our actions that might have served a regenerative function are perhaps instead a curse, an unbearable torment.

K: In your autobiography you talk about the native-alien experience and you talk about the psychological conflict and the pressing need to know that you belong somewhere. You say that this has been the schizophrenic theme in your writing. This was in 1965. Since then you have not made any critical statements about your writing.

G: The need to belong was perhaps strongly felt in 1964. I had been writing on that theme since 1959, almost all the poems in *The Loss of India* are to do with the idea of roots, of displacement and the desire to belong. But by writing so many poems and by writing the autobiography, I worked that out. As one grows older one realizes it's no use sitting and lamenting one's fate. After one has worked out that particular aspect of fate in a number of texts, then surely one has exhausted the theme and goes on to others. There is nothing of me really in *The Incredible Brazilian* and *Hulme's Investigations* and the other novels that have followed because in them I was simply making up stories or pursuing some compulsion of the imagination. Then I realized one day that even in *The Incredible Brazilian* I was talking about

myself. In a sense, I was talking about the idea of place. The attraction of self to a certain landscape. Certain images in it have to do with memories of having been to particular parts of Brazil, but one can say that I was unconsciously trying to create the idea of the human soul seeing a glimpse from time to time of paradise and longing to be there. The people in *A New History of Torments* are also seeking a paradise, Oyarzun has created one in the middle of the jungle. But it is a sterile paradise because his wife has left him and his daughter is a serpent of a woman. The paradise that has been created refuses to accommodate the soul in all its desire for beauty. I seem always to be searching for a paradise.

K: Does this search involve the notion of a quest?

G: Yes, and I think the quest is universal. The present is always a torment. We keep looking expectantly in case the next bend in the road will bring us an astonishing revelation.

K: Despite the quest, there appears to be always a sense of gloom.

G: Yes, I am a gloomy man. A wonderful quotation comes to mind, I think it's from Paul Valéry. "Optimists make bad writers."

K: In that sense the last ten years have not been any different?

G: No, I've got quite gloomier. In fact, if you notice in *A New History of Torments*, I end by destroying the world I had created. Incidentally, there's an echo from Wallace Stevens in the closing lines of the novel. People don't notice that my prose echoes with many references and images deliberately taken from some of the poets. If a reader were to reflect upon them, he would see something he had missed.

K: Over the years you have changed your form but there are certain threads which run through your work. But you have changed your form because the meaning is dependent on form. Was there any reason for abandoning the realistic form and going into other modes?

G: I think it's very boring to take the realistic form and keep working at it again and again. Surely, I'm aware of what has happened and what is happening in the literary world around me and I am very excited by the new and one of the enjoyments of life is to contribute something to the new. The desire is always to create that perfect masterpiece which has a hardness of matter, which is going to be enjoyed at several levels, and which is going to enchant everyone with the beauty of its form. Every time I finish a novel, I am filled with a sense of failure that I've

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not caught that elusive beauty, and so I start another one. A lovely foolishness, or an exquisite lunacy, fills my hours pursuing the unattainable.

K: Is there any reason why you didn't want to write about India?

G: I have not been back to India or Pakistan for twenty-three years. Neither country has given me the slightest recognition. But this has nothing to do with writing. As it happens, I wrote a short story a few months ago, called "The Savage Mother of Desire," which is set in India. Perhaps I might go on to do a larger work with an Indian setting, I don't know. But settings in my recent fictions are only an illusory reality, a semblance of a believable world, the truth I'm after is not to be discovered on that surface.

K: There are several references to India in *The Incredible Brazilian* and I wondered whether Brazil is a metaphor for India.

G: The Portuguese when they discovered Brazil thought it was India. They had simply lost their way, as I may have mine.

K: Are you interested in magical realism?

G: I am never interested in any *-ism* and would hate to be confined to a category. My recent novels might contain elements of magical realism, but then they also contain elements of Balzac, Tolstoy, Proust, Machado de Assis, and ten thousand others. The creation of a new text is an investigation into those possibilities of language that have not been exhausted; one assimilates past and present modes—all the *-isms*, if you like—and hopes to be astonished by the new shape that emerges. Valéry said: "A lion is made up of assimilated sheep."

K: You have moved from place to place but you have stuck to Latin America in five novels. How would you explain that?

G: Because it does not really matter where a novel is set provided its internal structure works. You could take *A New History of Torments* and change all the Spanish names to Indian names, substitute the Himalayas and the Ganges for the Andes and the Amazon, but the novel itself would not alter the slightest. Seeing that it's set in South America, reviewers have immediately perceived a comparison with Jorge Amado, Marquez, and Vargas Llosa; I suppose if I'd set it in India, they'd have seen a comparison with Tagore, Narayan, and the films of Satyajit Ray. People are eager to drop names and to put one into a category, and I have yet to see any evidence that anyone has read the book carefully. To

give you an example of sloppy reading, several reviewers both in America and in England called Mark Kessel an American when it's clearly stated that he's a South American, with the precise implication that he's a Brazilian.

K: One more thing about fiction. In your collection of short stories you begin with the prologue that makes certain statements. Why did you make such a statement and what were you trying to do?

G: *Statement against Corpses*, the collection of short stories, is only half mine, the other half is B. S. Johnson's. You must remember that when the book was produced, Johnson and I were two young men with rather an inflated idea about ourselves, out to make a name for ourselves. Therefore, we made up that provocative statement. Also, we were—certainly I was—ignorant of what was going on in the U.S., Europe, and South America, where the short story was a much more vital form than it was in England. So, you have to see that statement in the context of the narrow world in which the two young men lived at that time.

K: What did the narrow world consist of? Surely you must have had something in mind when you made the statement?

G: A world that praised such nonentities as Larkin and Amis had to be a narrow world. English writers in the first half of the twentieth century are a sorry lot: there is only one poet after Hopkins—Basil Bunting; only one novelist after George Eliot—Virginia Woolf. Yes, I know there were D. H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, E. M. Forster, but I think literary history will put them all into a sack full of others of the sorry lot and dump them into the already polluted English Channel. Were it not for a few Irishmen, a couple of Scots, and a Welshman, English literature of the first half of the twentieth century would be almost exclusively American. The interesting English writers began to emerge in the 1960s, and twenty years later I see more imaginatively exciting things coming out from England than from here, from America. The English seem to me to be doing again what they've always done when they've produced their best literature—opened their eyes to the rest of the world and taken from it what they can plunder and transform, a process that the English language is so good at accommodating. No more of that horrible domesticity with its kitchen sinks and small back gardens that prevailed in the Fifties. I shall be surprised if a really eminent writer doesn't emerge from England before this century is out. There is a great deal of fertile evidence, writers now in their forties are doing some remarkable things. There was none of this vitality in 1963,

which was a dead, a narrow time, when Johnson and I put our pretentious statement together.

K: Did you have any previously written stories?

G: None of my stories in *Statement against Corpses* had been written before Johnson and I decided to make a book together. My part of that book is awful, atrocious. The stories are naive, written out of ignorance, without any experience of an informed reading of fiction, a very juvenile work.

K: You have not been writing too many short stories in recent times.

G: That is because I have been writing novels and I find it difficult to write another kind of fiction at the same time.

K: It is not because you feel that the genre has certain limitations?

G: A really well-written story, a masterpiece like Faulkner's "Barn Burning," is a terrific imaginative experience. But with lesser minds, the form encourages dullness and triviality. There must be thousands of stories about adolescent problems, the tensions of middle-aged couples, and other common sociological matters, all deadly serious and excruciatingly dull.

K: Would you be willing to say something about your poems?

G: What would you like to ask?

K: How about the autobiographical element which critics have drawn attention to. I find that sometimes you take two or three incidents from your autobiography and fuse them into one poem.

G: A poem succeeds because of its form and the power of its language and not because its subject matter is autobiographically precise. What may have tormented a poet and driven him to write a certain poem is none of the reader's business, for the reader is looking at language and not at life.

K: You started writing at a time when lots of things were happening in England—the Movement, the Group poets—and you were in some ways associated with them. I am interested in what they were doing and how they influenced you.

G: My biggest influences at that time were Robert Browning, Hopkins, T. S. Eliot, and W. B. Yeats. As for the Movement, I was quite attracted to it at the start. Before the Movement, Dylan Thomas had been an important influence and in the year 1953 when he died, he was a very

strong influence on many young poets, and I was no exception. Similarly, I came under the passing spell of infatuation with Auden. I was greatly greatly impressed by him and went around reciting "In Praise of Limestone," and obviously that flowed into some of my own work. But by the time I wrote the poems in *The Loss of India*, I had outgrown both Thomas and Auden, although some of the poems might still have a lingering echo of these poets.

K: When you say outgrown is it because you find something wanting in them?

G: No, it's just that I realized that I was only mimicking their voice. That's how I suppose every poet begins. My earliest poems when I was a schoolboy in Bombay were a mimicking of Byron. Later it was Browning.

K: Did you also try to imitate their forms? Some of the poets you mentioned were difficult poets who were experimenting with language, form, and so forth.

G: Yes, I did that. Ottava rima, Spenserian stanza, terza rima, dramatic monologues, sestinas, villanelles, you name it, I did the lot. Very exciting it was too, at the time. It was useful training, I suppose, even though the modern poet doesn't always need these techniques and traditional forms.

K: In what sense would you define modern?

G: In the sense that Eliot, Pound, and Ashbery are modern. I wouldn't want to attempt a definition, however. Always a slightly pompous procedure, uttering definitions.

K: Would it be right to say that your poetry is more in the tradition of Larkin rather than Ted Hughes?

G: Neither, I would hope! But I can't disagree with your statement for part of my work. The poems in *The Loss of India* have something of both the Movement and also Hughes. For example, "Uncle Ayub" is the kind of "family" poem many people were writing in the Movement manner. Neat little portraits with bits of exquisite irony attached to them. And "This Landscape, These People" has the phrase "swift heels trail like ploughs," which surely is an echo of Hughes's opening image in "The Hawk in the Rain." But there is also Robert Lowell lurking over *The Loss of India*, perhaps a stronger presence than either Larkin or Hughes. The earliest poem in that book was written in 1959, the year in

which *Life Studies* was published in England, a book that made a very strong impression on me. There's not much to be said for my second book of poems, *Jets from Orange*, which has perhaps three or four decent poems but the rest deserve to be burned. There's too much posturing in it, a silly desire to make important statements. Since then I've discovered that I write best when I have nothing to say but have a desire to write a poem, a pressure of form within my mind, so that I look for images through which that form might emerge.

K: In terms of form, you seem to be getting more complex in *The Violent West*, more difficult to understand. Is this a new trend?

G: The poems in *The Violent West* were written after I came to Texas in 1969. The first course I taught at the university was in contemporary British and American poetry. I had met Theodore Roethke in London some years earlier and he had encouraged me to read a number of American poets who were scarcely known in England—Kunitz and Bishop, for example. I had read some and of course had a smattering of the major American poets—Stevens, Williams, Roethke himself. But when I began to teach at the university, I undertook an intensive study of some of these poets. Also, in 1968, I had visited New York, where I had been invited to give a reading at the Poetry Center and had met Eugene Guillevic from France, the Chilean Nicanor Parra, and several American poets; and in 1970, I was invited to read at the Library of Congress, where I met Francis Ponge from France, Yehuda Amichai from Israel, Vasko Popa from Yugoslavia. I drop all these names to make the point that a greatly varied and enormously rich poetry suddenly opened to me when I came to America. All these poets were available in London but the literary groups that I moved in uttered not a word about them. So, reading the European and South American poets, and studying the Americans more carefully, obviously the new poems I wrote were very different from those in my first two books. With a few exceptions, however, they were still not the poems I wanted to write. That is the common condition of the poet, to write so many poems in which his own voice is only a nearly inaudible whisper; they might look like genuine poems but in his own mind the poet is not deluded, he's the first to spot his own artistic failure. It is by rare good fortune that all the elements that constitute a beautiful poem come together, but one cannot hit upon that combination as an act of will. I suppose it's a gift reserved for the very few. No writer can ever presume that he has it or will be given it. He can only continue to live in that misty area of tense apprehensions where he has always resided, where

mysterious forms beckon him to capture their elusive appearance which is both luminous and opaque; and there, his fate might be to suffer lasting torment or, with luck, to experience ecstasy.

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# How Do We Know That We Know What We Know in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*?

BARBARA KREPS

Opening with a swinger of a secretary who peels toward the buff on a makeshift trapeze suspended from a chandelier and with a bunch of gymnasts who pile on top of each other to form a human pyramid until one of them is mysteriously shot out from the bottom, Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers* gets off to an undeniably muscular start; but when the play is over, certainly the most impressive gymnastics on display are far and away those performed by the author's agile mind. Such somber subjects as ethics and epistemology take on an unexpectedly funny aspect, as Stoppard's wit percolates through concepts normally accorded more reverential treatment. *Jumpers* stimulates a great deal of hilarity, but it also gives us a glimpse of what a world without ethical brakes would be like—and though we laugh at the witty phrasing, the vision itself is far from funny.

The play poses serious questions about both the basis and the limits of human knowledge, human values, and human behavior; but it fails to answer its own questions, and a few critics feel uneasy that so much that is important simply stays up in the air in the end and suspect that Tom Thinker was not up to the job he had taken on and had given it over to Tom Trickster.<sup>1</sup> They do not begrudge Stoppard's playing with so many of our assumptions: that is, after all, one of comedy's fundamental prerogatives. But they feel the playing ought finally to lead somewhere, and obviously *Jumpers* does not do that. All we get is a moratorium on argument: George's "STOP!," Archie's unreassuring

"Do not despair" speech, and Dotty's melancholy farewell to both the moon and the audience. Clearly there is a strong prejudice, which we are meant to side with, toward what George has to say about God and Good and the way he knows them; but we are left, when all is done, with the uneasy recognition that the play talks in a direction that its action contradicts. In part, this contradiction is due to Stoppard's depiction of George as a decidedly flawed hero; but our perplexity is finally due, I think, to our perceptions not only of the several and contradictory ways knowledge relates to ethical behavior, but also to the revelation that all the ways of "knowing" explored in the play can lead to error as well as to truth while, in the realm of ethics, good intention counts for everything, but it can also count for nothing.

The problem of knowing common to *Jumpers'* multiple plots (all in their own ways concerned with clearing up mysteries) becomes linked to the irony of intention through the complex relationship between appearance and reality in the play. The basic irony, of course, is that a man who is totally unaware of the mysteries going on under his own roof should be engaged in a serious effort to penetrate the "two quite unconnected mysteries" of "the God of Creation" and "the God of Goodness" (pp. 25-26).<sup>2</sup> For George learns only at a ridiculously late stage in the play that Duncan McFee is dead and that he has been killed in George's own living room possibly by George's own wife. Moreover, of all the characters on stage, George is the only one never to see the extremely visible corpse. George is thus frequently funny despite the overriding seriousness of his own intentions. Yet even though Stoppard's structure works so constantly against his professor, we never consider writing George off. On the contrary, even though we all see and know how much George fails to see, and therefore does not know, of reality, most of us listen with sympathy and shared belief to what he says to us about knowing and reality.

Still, George's philosophical inquiries are surrounded by a number of unknowns that, because they lie so literally close to home, necessarily throw ironic reflexes across George's attempts to penetrate the arcane: not only the murder of Duncan McFee, but the whereabouts of Thumper and whether Dotty and Archie are or are not having an affair are other mysteries posed by the play, mysteries that would seem more accessible to verification than George's grapplings with God and the ultimate nature of good. But what happened to Thumper is the only question about which we can have no final doubts. The play sets up several suspects, but stops short of telling us who murdered Duncan, and though Stoppard makes it difficult to believe that Dotty's and

Archie's relationship is as innocent as they claim, even about them the play leaves us uncertain. For as George himself reminds us when he relates the following anecdote about Wittgenstein (later cannibalized by Archie when he explains that he is "dermatographing" Dotty), appearances provide no sure basis for assumptions about reality:

Meeting a friend in a corridor, Wittgenstein said: "Tell me, why do people always say it was *natural* for men to assume that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth was rotating?" His friend said, "Well, obviously, because it just *looks* as if the sun is going round the earth." To which the philosopher replied, "Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if the earth was rotating?" (p. 75)

Kenneth Tynan recounts that in rehearsal *Jumpers* was turning out to be overlong, and that to meet the problem he himself, as house dramaturge at the National Theatre, "dictated to the cast a series of cuts and transpositions which reduced the text to what I considered a manageable length."<sup>3</sup> The Wittgenstein anecdote seems to be one of the cuts he was originally considering. Fortunately a great deal of material regarding the production of *Jumpers* has been conserved in the archives of the National Theatre where, among other things, I found the script first consigned to the actors, typed memos from "K.T.," and six handwritten pages (two outlining script changes and deletions plus four of brief reflections on the cuts proposed) which may be the revisions Tynan was referring to.<sup>4</sup> On the first of the two pages that note 262 lines to be cut we find "2.21: Wittgenstein (13 lines)." (The numbers refer to pagination in the house text.) This line has been crossed out, however, obviously because of the objection on the fourth yellow page, "Hard to cut Wittgenstein." And so Wittgenstein remained.

The anecdote is addressed point-blank to the audience rather than to the other characters on stage, and does not fit into plot events at the moment it is recounted; but despite this seeming break in the text I think that one reason Wittgenstein could not be cut—aside from the fact that the interruption heads off some sticky problems in both plot and ideology (a point I will come back to later)—is because the anecdote expresses so well the essence of Stoppard's vision in *Jumpers*. The fact that there are truths that we simply know, even though we cannot prove them, is an important concept in the play; but so too is just the opposite point—that we are often sure we know something about which we are in fact mistaken.

This lesson is offered on both sides of the footlights. For most of the play Stoppard privileges the audience, in the time-honored

fourth-wall tradition, with a knowledge of conversations and events in the Moore household that is (or so it seems) decidedly superior to George's, and the dislocation between his perceptions and the audience's is one of the play's sources of laughter. George, the professor of knowing, simply does not know a great deal that his audience does, and he remains unaware of just how much he does not know until he takes that fatal step at the end of Act II and blacks out into the dream Coda, presumably from the shock of discovering that he has inadvertently killed both of his beloved pets. Volition, George discovers, does not necessarily dictate event, and a person can do things he never intended to do: that is a shocking revelation to George of limits he never suspected in his moral code. But this unexpected turn of events is just as shocking for the audience, and by the end of *Jumpers* they discover that George is not the only one for whom Stoppard has been laying traps about knowing.

Stoppard confessed in a now much-quoted interview published by *Theatre Quarterly* in 1974 that one of his aims in writing is to set "ambushes for the audience," an aim obviously achieved in *Jumpers*. For if at the end the audience is caught unaware it is because Stoppard has worked so hard from the beginning to make them unaware. He skillfully exploits the audience's tendency to believe what they think they have seen to provide the starting point of the play's action; when the play is over, however, the audience's misinterpretation of matters they have been sure about also elucidates in retrospect one of the play's principal points about knowledge and belief.

At the beginning of the printed editions of *Jumpers*, Stoppard provides detailed instructions about the set and its furnishings, though his final directive is that "none of the above is visible for the first few minutes of the play, for which is required an empty space . . ." (p. 14). Except for a spotlight trained on Dotty and the Jumpers, the stage is in darkness when Duncan's murder takes place, a fact of obvious importance to the audience's interpretation of much that follows. After all, the audience seated in the theater did not have the benefit of a hint buried in the printed stage directions that what one sees is limited and therefore may not be very useful for getting at truth:

*from her position in the near-dark outside the JUMPERS' light, it should be possible to believe that DOTTY is responsible for what happens next—*  
which is:

*A gun shot.*

*ONE JUMPER, bottom row, second front left, is blown out of the pyramid.*

*He falls downstage, leaving the rest of the pyramid intact. The music has stopped. DOTTY, chanteuse, walks through the gap in the pyramid.*

What we see not only makes it "possible to believe" that Dotty killed Duncan, but for most of the play leaves us and many of the play's characters with absolutely no doubt that she did so. We never totally release Dotty from our suspicions, but the introduction of new evidence late in the play enlarges the list of suspects and makes her seem the least likely of them. Archie plants the first seeds of doubt when he tells Bones that he had his own reasons for wanting to eliminate Duncan. But if for a time Archie deflects our suspicions from Dotty, a third possible culprit emerges unexpectedly at the end of Act II, when McFee's secret affair with George's secretary is revealed. "A grim, tense, unsmiling woman," she stares into the audience as Crouch recounts the history of her unhappy affair with Duncan and "snaps her handbag shut with a sharp sound" of finality at the precise moment Crouch says "And now he's dead."

What can we deduce from appearances? The stage business underlines the probability that the secretary is the assassin, but it is certainly not proof, and Stoppard teases his audience at just this point with Archie's pronouncement about the difference between mystery novels and life:

The truth to us philosophers, Mr. Crouch, is always an interim judgement. We will never even know for certain who did shoot McFee. Unlike mystery novels, life does not guarantee a denouement; and if it came how would one know whether to believe it? (p. 81).

If for a moment the sight of blood on the secretary's coat convinces the audience that they know more than Archie does, the "evidence" turns out to be yet another of Stoppard's ambushes, for the blood is soon revealed to be not Duncan's but Thumper's.

The text as played in 1972 signals the secretary as Duncan's probable murderer, but we can never know with certainty. Tynan was disturbed by the ambiguity and complained about it in two behind-the-scenes memos sent to Stoppard, Sir Laurence Olivier, and director Peter Wood. In the undated memo ("A few proposals after the run-through, based on the conviction that even when the technical problems are solved, we shall still be overlength"), Tynan's fifth proposal reads: "I know Tom's objection to this, but I still maintain that to set up a whodunit and not reveal whodidit is very confusing. The audience will feel cheated." In the memo dated January 19 ("Three

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more thoughts about JUMPERS"), this objection was more fully explained:

Even if Tom rejects the idea of saying who did it, I'm certain that there should be at least a statement to the effect that it doesn't matter who did it. As things stand, the question we've been asking all evening is simply ignored at the end. I don't think it can be set aside so lightly—not only for theatrical reasons, but also because murder is a crime against morality and one of our main themes is the validity of morality.

Tynan did not get his way on this point. Indeed, when the play was revived in 1976 for its third National Theatre production, the secretary's business with the purse as Crouch reveals her secret does not appear in the stage directions, an omission that weakens the 1972 tendency toward a "mystery novel denouement" and emphasizes the play's concern for demonstrating the difficulty of knowing.

Though Stoppard's theatrical ambushes reinforce one line of *Jumpers'* epistemology by uncovering the pitfalls of taking anything for granted, the play's ethical argument defends not only the validity but the necessity of values we can intuit but not verify. The play's allegiance to both points militates against a definitive resolution for or against either and, as George is caught in the middle of this ongoing dialectic, he cuts an incongruous figure. He is—at least up until the Coda—the play's only ethical standard-bearer and, though we sometimes laugh at the way he expresses himself, our own instincts approve and applaud when he holds out against his pragmatic adversaries his simple truth that though the desire to act well may be scientifically unexplainable, it is nonetheless a human reality to be found in all societies, from the most primitive to the most technologically complex. George knows instinctively that certain moral values simply exist, which give rise in turn to such impulses as "honour . . . pride, shame, fellow-feeling, generosity and love" (p. 55). This much is anthropologically verifiable, but why these values exist is a separate question: "Whence comes this sense of some actions being better than others?—not more useful, or more convenient, or more popular, but simply pointlessly better? What, in short, is so good about good?" (p. 55).

Unlike his onomastic predecessor (who in the *Principia Ethica* disavowed any connection between metaphysics and ethics), the George Moore of *Jumpers* thinks that in order to find the answer to "what is so good about good" the question of God must be admitted, though Stoppard gives him an odd way of phrasing it:

I sometimes wonder whether the question ought not to be, "Are

God?" Because it is to account for two quite unconnected mysteries that the human mind looks beyond humanity and it is two of him that philosophy obligingly provides. There is, first, the God of Creation to account for existence, and, second, the God of Goodness to account for moral values. I say they are unconnected because there is no logical reason why the fountainhead of goodness in the universe should have necessarily created the universe in the first place; nor is it necessary, on the other hand, that a Creator should care tuppence about the behaviour of his creations. Still, at least in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, nothing is heard either of a God who created the universe and then washed his hands of it, or, alternatively a God who merely took a comparatively recent interest in the chance product of universal gases. In practice, people admit a Creator to give authority to moral values, and admit moral values to give point to the Creation. (pp. 25-26)

But since this is the century that has officially proclaimed God dead, George is aware that there is a certain amount of embarrassment in the position of an intellectual who wishes to resurrect Him: "There is presumably a calendar date—a *moment*—when the onus of proof passed from the atheist to the believer, when, quite suddenly, secretly the noes had it. (*And squeezes a blackhead in the imaginary mirror. Then he straightens up and is the lecturer again.*)" (p. 25).

What we see here, as so often in the play, is that George's sensibilities and Stoppard's are in a comic clash. George is quite earnest about everything he says and he lacks anything resembling a sense of humor, but the somber delivery he aims for is frequently not the tone he achieves. For George's serious and orthodox questions about God and good have to filter through Stoppard's comically unorthodox way of phrasing them: "Are God?"; the anthropomorphic reductio ad absurdum of a God who cares (or else does not) about tuppence and gas; a God who perhaps "washed his hands" of moral responsibility (an audacious linguistic turnabout, considering how the phrase originated). George as thinker is perforce stuck with the fact that Stoppard is always there putting words into his mouth. And at the very moment George is seriously wrestling with the difficulty of faith in the modern world, Stoppard afflicts him with an urge to squeeze a blackhead, presumably on his nose ("the noes had it"). Nor do George's ideas remain greatly consistent if Stoppard sees a joke coming on. Thus on ethical questions George backs the instincts of nonphilosophical common man against "the prevailing temper of modern philosophy" while Stoppard peppers George's attempt at straightforward professional logic with comically

unexpected examples of bungalows and teak boxes (a phrase that distances and diffuses into laughter what is unlaughable in the lexically more exact phrase "teak coffins"):

Certainly a tribe which believes it confers honour on its elders by eating them is going to be viewed askance by another which prefers to buy them a little bungalow somewhere, and Professor McFee should not be surprised that the notion of honour should manifest itself so differently in peoples so far removed in clime and in culture. What is surely more surprising is that notions such as honour should manifest themselves at all. For what is honour? What are pride, shame, fellow-feeling, generosity and love? If they are instincts, what are instincts? The prevailing temper of modern philosophy is to treat the instinct as a sort of terminus for any train of thought that seeks to trace our impulses to their origins. But what can be said to be the impulse of a genuinely altruistic act? Hobbes might have answered self-esteem, but what is the attraction or the point in thinking better of oneself. What is *better*? A savage who elects to honour his father by eating him as opposed to disposing of his body in some—to him—ignominious way, for example by burying it in a teak box, is making an ethical choice in that he believes himself to be acting as a good savage ought to act. Whence comes this sense of some actions being better than others? . . . Professor McFee succeeds only in showing us that in different situations different actions will be deemed, rightly or wrongly, to be conducive to that which is independent of time and place and which is knowable but not nameable. (pp. 54–55)

On the question of God's existence, however, George's view of common sense is tinged with denigration:

A small number of men, by the exercise of their intellects and by the study of the works both of nature and of other intellects before them, have been able to argue coherently against the existence of God. A much larger number of men, by the exercise of their emotional and psychological states, have affirmed that this is the correct view. This view derives partly from what is known as common sense, whose virtue, uniquely among virtues, is that everybody has it, and partly from the mounting implausibility of a technological age as having divine origins—for while a man might believe that the providence of sheep's wool was made in heaven, he finds it harder to believe the same of Terylene mixture. (p. 25)

In playing, of course, it is a discrepancy not likely to be noticed. What we do notice—consistently—is the tension between George's single-track mind and the multitrack world, which generates so much of the play's

laughter. George never gets over his wistful nostalgia for the days of the lamb's lost innocence, and though Stoppard makes George appealing for just this reason, he also dramatizes a world beyond the walls of George's study with tigers even more fearful than Terylene mixture. Indeed, the clash between innocence and experience, which George implicitly acknowledges here in his contrast of the pastoral with the technological, lies behind most of what takes place in *Jumpers*.

Jim Hunter, who has noted a pattern of "comic collision" in Stoppard's plays, observes that what we often find in Stoppard is the contrast between a "self-contained logic" and "the mess, contingency, and awkwardness of the real world."<sup>5</sup> George's desire to remain undisturbed in his study is a physical sign of the kind of "self-contained logic" Hunter speaks of, but Stoppard's split stage is a constant reminder that George lives in a world of contradictions with which the professor fails to come to terms. George is the only character we are permitted to admire in *Jumpers*, but Stoppard sends various signals that George's message and George as medium are not necessarily on the same plane (a point that will be illustrated more fully in my discussion of the Coda).

A great deal of the comedy of *Jumpers* resides in how Stoppard sabotages George along the way, but there are also a few significant moments when he lets George have his say without undercutting him. When the play is over we all know that Stoppard basically shares George's contention that there is more to man's existence than the materialists' arguments allow. George's major philosophical antagonists are, of course, the logical positivists, whose dismissal of metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics derived from their claim that metaphysical, ethical, and aesthetic statements are not subject to verification, and are therefore meaningless. Their assault on these traditional areas of philosophical inquiry came principally through an aggressive analysis of the language in which statements about them are made. It is because of this importance language assumed in the positivists' method that George is so concerned with pointing out the limitations of language: "language is an approximation of meaning and not a logical symbolism for it" (p. 24); "language is a finite instrument crudely applied to an infinity of ideas" (p. 63); and, anticipating McFee's arguments at the symposium:

he goes on to show . . . that the word "good" has also meant different things to different people at different times, an exercise which combines simplicity with futility in a measure he does not apparently suspect, for on the one hand it is not a statement

which anyone would dispute, and on the other, nothing useful can be inferred from it. It is not in fact a statement about value at all; it is a statement about language and how it is used in a particular society. (p. 54)

In short, as George's disquisition on the various meanings of "the word 'good'" indicates (cf. pp. 66-67), the problem with the positivists is that they treat "the word 'good'" *only* as a word.

Part of George's trouble with language is that he wants to pin it down so that equivocations about such things as the difference between a good bacon sandwich and the Good Samaritan would not occur. But unfortunately for George, language will not do that—particularly when Stoppard is writing it—and so he is stuck with being George Moore, a philosopher whose wife's name is Dorothy, but not *the* George Moore (a philosopher whose wife's name was Dorothy), in a world where the late Bertrand Russell was never late and George's own proof that God exists depends on accepting an equation in which God is nought (this latter paradox must not have been fully enough appreciated by the early audiences, since in 1976 Stoppard makes George pause and add in perplexity "that can't be right").

Both Stoppard and George are equally aware that language plays tricks on its users. But if Stoppard has emerged as a master writer of comedy because of this fact, George finds himself not totally at ease with language in his own profession. This is certainly evident to us during the preparation of his paper for the symposium, when George starts, stops, and begins again, constantly floundering about and never quite discovering how to buckle his life jacket securely in the sea of speech; and George openly admits to Bones this fact of his discomfort with language:

**GEORGE:** I had hoped to set British moral philosophy back forty years, which is roughly when it went off the rails, but unfortunately, though my convictions are intact and my ideas coherent, I can't seem to find the words . . .

**BONES:** Well, "Are God?" is wrong for a start.

**GEORGE:** Or rather, the words betray the thoughts they are supposed to express. Even the most generalized truth begins to look like special pleading as soon as you trap it in language. (p. 46)

And yet, though George is not fully comfortable in what twentieth-century philosophers have called "the language game," he acquiesces in playing one with his wife all the same. But then the charades he and Dotty play only show up how little they are really communicating—a point made with comic brilliance when George's unexpected entry into

the bedroom might have led to his discovery of the Jumper's body and, hence, of his wife's predicament:

(As GEORGE opens the door, DOTTY calmly lets her robe slip down her back until it hangs like a drape below her buttocks, her arms, still in the sleeves, held out to the sides; thus concealing the JUMPER from view. Thus, she is naked from the thighs up, back view. GEORGE glances casually at her as he crosses the room.)

GEORGE: Bottom?

(DOTTY lifts the robe to cover her bottom.)

Back . . . Somebody's back . . . ?

(He picks up the tortoise. DOTTY turns to look at him coquettishly over her shoulder. He is recrossing the room towards the door.)

Lulu's back!—in town—Very good!

(He leaves, closing the door, and re-enters the Study.)

A good visual gag, it is also a practical illustration in theatrical terms of how "the language game" can hide from view a truth that everyone in the theater knows is there.

Language is only one of the forces of opposition to George's affirmation that there are ideals and absolutes, however, and though from George's point of view language may be bothersome, it never constitutes a threat that could seriously undermine George's (or the audience's) conviction that moral imperatives exist. In the end, the really formidable antagonist to George's position lies not in "the language game" but in the large television screen against the bedroom wall: a brilliant stroke of theater, the televised struggle between the two astronauts takes the problems attending "idealism" and "pragmatism" out of the realm of theory and shows what they can mean in human practice.

This is an important point, but it has been strangely ignored. Critics recall the historically finer Oates and Scott, whose heroism on the Antarctic expedition is ironically reversed by their namesakes on the moon, and they find in the moon-men two more components of that jaded materialistic world headed by Archie and the Rad-Libs, an unprincipled bunch against which George conducts his solitary but admirable battle for ideals.<sup>6</sup> The description is true, as far as it goes, but the astronauts' role is also more complex than that. One direction of the ironic light they shed on the play's moral arguments certainly comes from their names and nasty behavior, but quite another reflex comes from the way they are bound into the play's structure.

We see the astronauts in the first few minutes of playing and,

though our attention is not focused on them again until the end of Act II, when they reemerge it is in a context which reveals that, notwithstanding the tininess of their role, the astronauts present important limits and conditions for *Jumpers'* action and argument—not only because of their effect on Dotty, but because they point to a blind spot (which Stoppard dramatizes as both literal and figurative) in George's ethical argument. The astronauts are a significant ambush, because their struggle for survival, which George never sees, demonstrates in radical terms that the issue George has been debating all night is not a mere matter of armchair theorizing. Stoppard, of all people, knows how easy it can be just to talk. But one of the main points *Jumpers* finally makes is that ethical discourse does not mean very much if it is not translated into action.

Skin-saving Captain Scott represents on the moon the new Rad-Lib age of unprincipled materialism George so rightly fights against in his study, but at the same time he also represents a reality that George quite literally does not see and so does not take into account as he prepares his talk on "Man—good, bad, or indifferent?" Dotty, however, has seen the events on the moon and, as we share her knowledge, we have to admit that Stoppard affirms what Dotty says when she hurls her challenge at George's fine idealism near the end of the play:

Man is on the Moon, his feet on solid ground, and he has seen us whole, all in one go, *little—local . . .* and all our absolutes, the thou-shalts and the thou-shalt-nots that seemed to be the very condition of our existence, how did *they* look to two moonmen with a single neck to save between them? Like the local customs of another place. When that thought drips through to the bottom, people won't just carry on. There is going to be such . . . breakage, such gnashing of unclean meats, such covetting of neighbours' oxen and knowing of neighbours' wives, such dishonourings of mothers and fathers, and bowings and scrapings to images graven and incarnate, such killing of goldfish and maybe more—(*Looks up, tear-stained.*) Because the truths that have been taken on trust, they've never had edges before, there was no vantage point to stand on and see where they stopped. (p. 75)

George has been preparing himself all along for his professional antagonist McFee, but to Dotty's very practical objections he has no answer (as we shall see, only in part because he does not know what she is talking about)—and so it is here, in fact, that he turns away from what is happening on stage to address his non sequitur Wittgenstein anecdote to the audience.

Dotty has had ideals about the moon, as well as a successful career singing about them. But seeing what amounts to murder telecast from space unhinges her romantic notions of a "spooney Juney moon" and causes her to stumble, like her philosopher husband, on the words central to her career; but whereas George tries to plod through the lexical confusion and manages despite it to maintain his equanimity, Dotty cannot. For though George "can't seem to find the words," he still succeeds, as he assured Bones, in keeping his "convictions . . . intact" and his "ideas coherent." For Dotty, though, the intrusion of reality defaces her ideal moon to the point that she cannot put the words together any more to celebrate it, and so her career comes to an end.

But if Dotty and her career are so disabled by Captain Scott's pragmatic choice, Stoppard makes things easier for George by never forcing him to see or comment on the happenings on the moon. The text as finally played and printed did not underscore George's ignorance of the astronauts. But the original script contained a dialogue between Dotty and George (subsequently deleted) which explicitly signaled George's myopia to the audience. The cross-purpose dialogue reproduced below is taken from pages 1.20 and 1.21 of the original version conserved in the National Theatre archives (the first and last lines of which appear back to back on page 38 of the 1973 Faber and Faber version):

GEORGE: What happened to the old Archbishop?

DOTTY: He abdicated . . . or resigned or uncoped himself—the terminology lags behind the fact.

GEORGE: (*thoughtfully*) Dis-mantled himself, perhaps.

DOTTY: At any rate, he stepped down from the pulpit, after roundly abusing the government for its equivocation on everything from the corruption of the police to the moon murder, as he insisted on calling it.

GEORGE: Another one? I can't bear it, the thought of all those poor little typists and nurses strangled in the rhododendrons . . . (*handwriting appears here in the margin: "New line. 'What moon murder'"*).

DOTTY: The *moon murder*. He said it would be on all our consciences if the moon man wasn't brought to trial.

GEORGE: The newspapers are largely to blame.

DOTTY: What are you talking about?

GEORGE: If you encourage people to associate a full moon with madness, the more impressionable among them will convince themselves that they are helpless to curb their natural appetites for sexual assault and it's bound to lead to tragic excesses.

DOTTY: Where the hell have you been for the last two days?  
(GEORGE is suddenly galvanised by the sense of time being lost; he darts towards the window where he left, or perhaps whither has crept, his tortoise. After his next line, DOTTY changes channel to the Moon Programme, so GEORGE's "good God!" (below) co-incides with the change of image on the Screen, to a lunar landscape.)

GEORGE: (moving to window) You know perfectly well I have been working on my—

(Screen changes. GEORGE recoils from window.) Good God!

DOTTY: Has it all changed to a lunar landscape?

GEORGE: (at window) I can actually see Clegthorpe!—marching along, attended by two chaplains in belted raincoats.

A memo of January 24, with the heading "some cuts and changes to be considered. Coda to be discussed," contains this further comment on the recently excised parts of the script:

- 1.21 "The local idea of a sane action" [Though crossed out in the production script, this was finally kept. See below and Faber, p. 38] seems to depend on the passage we have cut abt the moon murder. I think this might be the moment to tell the audience (if they really didn't register the TV tape) what happened on the moon.

This:—

D: Still an open question: red carpet or black maria? What does one do about

Dot: Poor moonman, falling home like Lucifer. And it's still an open question whether he's met with a red carpet or a black maria. What does one do about a man who leaves his companion to die on the moon, like that, fighting like animals for the only place in a capsule coming home on half power?

a clapped-out capsule coming home at half cock? Was it a crime? Or good sense? Or a moment of madness? Of course, to somebody on it, the moon is always full, so the local idea of a sane action may well differ from ours... And so on. I think this works. With 50 new words! But as Paul insists on saying, you can't not have any no cake and er eat it.

In the end this revision was not adopted, probably because a specific invitation to the audience *consciously* to weigh the question: "Was it a crime? Or good sense? Or a moment of madness?", coming so early, could seriously undermine George's position for the rest of the play. That is to say, the audience had to know about the astronauts but at the same time not have the chance to register their full significance: as the

memo implies, the cake had to be there, but if the audience ate it too soon it would spoil their appetite for what follows—and so it was structurally preferable at this point to have, as the memo puts it, "no cake."

The presence of the astronauts poses from the beginning a serious test for George's humanitarian values, but that challenge is obviously best verbalized at the end, after George's values have had a chance to be completely aired and to enjoy audience acceptance. Stoppard refused to present a one-sided argument and insisted on dramatizing the problems inherent in George's values, but his sympathies are obviously on George's side. This is clear, since even late in the play Stoppard does what he can to salvage George as long as possible. For the Wittgenstein anecdote is, in essence, a diversionary tactic, a smoke screen for the audience, provided by the author to allow George to sneak out of the ideological hole the author himself had dug for him—but in the end it is only a stopgap measure. Stoppard permits his professor to live out the play in ignorance of what has happened on the moon, but by including the astronauts from the beginning Stoppard provides not only an ironic background to George's idealistic argument, but also an implicit challenge to George's stated values—a challenge that in some form or other George and his partisans in the audience must eventually be made to recognize.

It is this consideration that leads me to take up the question of the Coda. Because of its structural clumsiness, the Coda perplexes most people who write about the play. The Coda is clearly anticlimactic and, as production memos in the archives attest, the problem was recognized and discussed a number of times behind the scenes at the National Theatre. By the time *Jumpers* opened in 1972, the Coda had already undergone radical revision; when the play went into rehearsal the Coda was fifteen pages long, as opposed to the five pages it was finally chopped down to in the house's performance text (with some extremely minor variations, the 1972 Faber printing gives us this text on pages 83–89). The original version of the Coda included testimony by Lord Greystoke—better known to the public as Tarzan—on the questions of instinct and relative values in the jungle. Point 10 of Tynan's undated memo reads: "I think the Coda is too long and looks at times merely facetious—e.g. Tarzan. I could really do without him, especially as his swinging entrance detracts from Dotty's swinging entrance minutes later."

Tynan was right. There are some good gags in the Tarzan bit (e.g., to Archie's "tell my lord what sort of things stirred your deepest feelings

of approval and disapproval" Tarzan responds, "Well, bananas were good, and boa constrictors were bad"), but the whole thing is woefully inappropriate at this point, and only the actor playing Tarzan could harbor any regrets for his disappearance from the Coda. As Tynan pointed out, Tarzan was a distraction, in terms of both thought and theater. Cutting away ten of the original fifteen pages was an admission that the Coda presented serious problems, but even such drastic surgery did not finally satisfy. Having to think about the text once again, Stoppard himself was evidently convinced that difficulties remained, and he took the trouble to go back and revise the play's end yet again, when *Jumpers* was presented for the second time by the National Theatre, a change Stoppard discusses in the February 1973 "Postscript" to the "Author's Note" that prefaces the play. Even this revised version fails to make the Coda seem other than a structural flaw, however. But since Stoppard thought about the Coda enough to cut certain portions without seeing fit to suppress the Coda altogether, we ought to ask why he insisted on keeping the Coda—particularly since close attention to structure is a salient feature of all of his other plays, even the nuts-and-bolts comedies he dismisses as slight works. Evidently Stoppard felt that what happens in the Coda is too significant to be excluded, and so he kept it, despite his own recognition of the structural problems it creates.

The Coda represents on stage the dream that comes to George as a result of his fall at the end of Act II. When it starts, we are pushed ahead in time to the symposium for which George has been preparing his lecture throughout the play. This is the intellectual court where his ideas are finally to be tried in opposition to the materialistic school headed by Archie Jumper, but as dreams tend to work by association rather than by strict logic, the dream symposium quickly assumes more the form of a criminal trial in a kangaroo court than a serious intellectual debate in a university philosophy department. George does not know it himself at the end of Act II (and he will never know it), but as regards Duncan McFee, the principal opponent he has all along been preparing himself to answer at the symposium, George's ethical point has already been won. For however much Duncan might have adhered intellectually to the materialist school of thought, Crouch reveals to us at the end of Act II that Duncan was not prepared to live in a real world dominated by astronaut Scott's me-first values. But Duncan has been dead since the beginning of the play, and though Archie *might* have killed him for his defection from the *Jumpers'* school of strict materialism, Stoppard's insistence that knowing the truth about reality

can be difficult made him finally leave uncertain both the motive and the perpetrator of Duncan's murder. (Indeed, Stoppard's revisions of the original text reduced the probability that Archie was the culprit.)

But such an ending clouds the play's equally important concern with the primacy of moral responsibility by leaving us on the one hand with a vision of George who, counter to all his beliefs and intentions, inadvertently murders his pets while preparing a lecture on morality, and on the other with an Archie who may not be admirable and likable, but who has not yet given an unequivocal demonstration that what he represents is evil. Stoppard was evidently attracted by both the truth and the humor of showing the world as a place where the best-laid plans go astray. But he also shows an awareness that if irony is part of the human picture (pointing to the third option in the symposium's question "Man—good, bad or indifferent?"), intention and decision-making finally also have to be shown to count—otherwise the whole question of morality may be discarded as irrelevant to human behavior. That, I think, is why he insisted on keeping the Coda. For it is there that George finally experiences firsthand the real ethical problem that has all along been posed by the astronauts. And when it comes to the practical question of neck-saving, George discovers—like Captain Scott—that the truths he has taken on trust do indeed have edges that cut.

George is not, as Archie finally reveals himself to be in the Coda, an active force for evil, but by failing to come to Clegthorpe's aid George becomes a passive accomplice to his murder. In the 1972 version, George fished lamely for excuses for his cowardice when Clegthorpe appealed to him:

CLEGTHORPE: Professor—it's not right. George—help.

CROUCH: Do you have any questions for this witness, Professor?

GEORGE: Er . . . no, I don't think so.

CROUCH: Thank you.

GEORGE: (*The music goes louder.*)

Well, this seems to be a political quarrel. . . . Surely only a proper respect for absolute values . . . universal truths—philosophy— (p. 85)

In 1976 Stoppard rewrote this passage, adding a rueful echo of the Wittgenstein anecdote that had served to halt Dotty's attack on George's absolutes in Act II:

CLEG: George, it's not right—George, help.

CROUCH: Do you have any questions for this witness Professor?

GEORGE: No, I don't think so.

ARCHIE: Thank you.

CLEG: George, help!

GEORGE: Meeting a friend in a corridor, the Good Samaritan said: "Surely this is a political argument . . ."

(*Gunshot. CLEGTHORPE falls to the base of the pyramid, dead.*)

GEORGE: My very old friend—now dead, of course . . .

ARCHIE: Thank you.

GEORGE: Secondly . . .

ARCHIE: Call Dotty Moore.

Stoppard's substitution of "George" for "Professor" underscores the personal and decidedly nonacademic nature of Clegthorpe's appeal. But if that is a subtlety, the rewrite's ironic allusion to the Good Samaritan (who reminds us here just why we do not tend to confuse him with a good bacon sandwich) clearly emphasizes George's moral failure and underlines the point already obvious from George's behavior, that having moral convictions will not necessarily make one moral.

The moral argument of the play breaks off with the murder of Clegthorpe. To be sure, Stoppard invites us at the end to side with George's vision of good, though the recurrence of the word "better" in George's final speech applies this time not to ethical questions but to the value of intuition with undeniable demonstrations that whatever else the fashionably skeptical might deny knowing, they all know "that life is better than death, that love is better than hate, and that the light shining through the east window of their bloody gymnasium is more beautiful than a rotting corpse!" As with the Wittgenstein anecdote, Stoppard is clearly trying to salvage George from a tight spot at the end, and judging from how often this last passage is quoted in George's favor, it would seem that he has been quite successful. If we reflect on it closely, however, George's final affirmations do not really set him off from either Archie or Captain Scott, as he does not propose any values either of them would have any difficulty accepting. (On the contrary, Scott is well aware that "life is better than death," while Archie, at least as far as Dotty goes, is all for love.) But as the argument has then suddenly switched from ethics to epistemology, the last impression we get of George is that he is in the right. George is thus resuscitated and largely rehabilitated for many people in the audience in what is Stoppard's final ambush.

Neither the moral nor the epistemological questions raised by Stoppard are finally resolved in *Jumpers*. On the one hand, there is much that seems admirable and sympathetic and humanly comforting

about George and his stubborn conviction that, intellectual games aside, goodness is simply a fact that anyone with common sense can recognize. On the other hand, Stoppard shows that there are severe limitations to common sense and intuited knowledge; for he demonstrates that intuitions, being based on how things seem to us, may be right, but they can also be wrong (as we see, for example, when George mistakenly concludes on the basis of appearances that Dotty has murdered both Thumper and Duncan). The problem is not purely epistemological. For the difficulty of knowing, in a world where appearances do not always reveal reality, raises the problem of ethical responsibility for action, as when bad actions are unintentionally committed simply because (afflicted as we are with limited vision) we are unaware that we are committing them. Certainly Stoppard demonstrates that even the well-intentioned can inflict hurt on the very objects they meant to love and protect. But then where does that leave intention and responsibility? Hence the need for a coda, tacked onto a play that was essentially finished, to demonstrate that, however much or little we may admit God to the question, there are actions a man has to choose and that he is in consequence of choice, morally responsible for them.

Obviously a great deal is contradictory of all of this. Stoppard has been criticized by some for what has seemed unfinished thinking in *Jumpers*. Stoppard is aware of the contradictions, though, and in the 1974 *Theatre Quarterly* interview he insisted that this is exactly the aspect of his work that he finds valuable:

I must make clear that, insofar as it's possible for me to look at my own work objectively at all, the element which I find most valuable is the one that other people are put off by—that is, that there is very often *no* single, clear statement in my plays. What there is, is a series of conflicting statements made by conflicting characters, and they tend to play a sort of infinite leap-frog. You know, an argument, a refutation, then a rebuttal of the refutation, then a counter-rebuttal, so that there is never any point in this intellectual leap-frog at which I feel *that* is the speech to stop it on, *that* is the last word.<sup>7</sup>

In *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon*, published in 1966, the hapless Mr. Moon says much the same thing when he confesses to O'Hara that, "since all the absolutes discredit each other," he is unable to align himself with any of them:

I take both parts, O'Hara, leapfrogging myself along the great moral issues, refuting myself and rebutting the refutation towards a truth that must be a compound of two opposite half-truths. And you never reach it because there is always

something more to say. But I can't ditch it, you see O'Hara. I can't just align myself with whatever view has the approved moral tone to it.<sup>8</sup>

The problem is, in Moon's most succinct statement of it, that "I cannot commit myself to either side of a question. . . . And I can't even side with the balance of morality because I don't know whether morality is an instinct or just an imposition."<sup>9</sup> Unlike Stoppard, however, Moon is unsure whether his difficulty in locating unequivocal truths is due to his own unassertive nature or to the nature of the world around him, and he is wistfully apologetic about it all. The eight-year time span between the publication of *Lord Malquist* and the *Theatre Quarterly* interview makes clear that the belief that sooner or later "all the absolutes discredit each other" was not mere unfinished thinking on Stoppard's part, but rather the conclusion that thinking on the subject a number of times had repeatedly brought him to. Thus in *Jumpers*, though his sympathies obviously lie with George and what he has to say about knowledge and morality, Stoppard went out of his way (even to the point of creating artistic difficulties like that of the Coda) to demonstrate the weak spots both in George's character and in what George tells us.

The various script changes and production notes help to illustrate that the contradictions and inconclusiveness were thought about and worked over a number of times but, despite objections raised behind the scenes at the National Theatre, Stoppard remained adamantly faithful to his vision that "knowing" is a tricky business and that as a result living is a messy, unstable mixture of purpose and contingency. He remained faithful, too, to an ethical vision that is neither simplistic nor reductive. George's argument that non-self-serving qualities such as "honour, pride, shame, fellow-feeling, generosity and love" are observable in human behavior is a de facto common-sense demonstration that ideals and values do exist—a conviction shared by the audience which is surprisingly convalidated at the end by the behavior of George's own enemies, McFee and Cleghorpe.

But the argument about instinctive values George constructs in his study finds its antithesis in the bedroom, not so much in the unprincipled behavior of Archie and his *Jumpers* as in the behavior of the astronauts, whose struggle for survival dramatizes an aspect of instinctive "common sense" that, despite his moral convictions, George himself finally acts upon when he ignores Cleghorpe's appeal for help. George's failure to translate his understanding of value into action when faced with personal danger does not destroy his argument that

values exist; but it does disappoint our expectations of George, and points to a realistic hole in his ethical theory that Stoppard further underscored in 1976 when he added the allusion to the Good Samaritan. The parable does not, after all, invite us to compare the Samaritan's charity with the clear evil committed by the thieves, but rather with the cowardly behavior of the priest and the Levite, men whose professional commitments to God's service did not keep them from crossing to the other side of the road when they came upon the wounded man. Like the story in Luke, *Jumpers* illustrates the homely truth that men who know what good is will not necessarily act on what they know. The irony and realism of the biblical lesson are, however, superseded by the Samaritan's arrival to provide a happy ending, whereas *Jumpers* reverses the parable's direction by holding up a vision of good which is then punctured by the realistic demonstration that, where self-interest may be compromised, goodness is easier to recognize and talk about than it is to act upon.

<sup>1</sup> John Weightman, "A Metaphysical Comedy," *Encounter*, 38 (Apr. 1972), 45; Jonathon Bennett, "Philosophy and Stoppard," *Philosophy*, 50, No. 191 (1975), 5-8; G. S. Robinson, "Plays without Plot: The Theatre of Tom Stoppard," *Educational Theatre Journal* (Mar. 1977), 47; Philip Roberts, "Tom Stoppard: Serious Artist or Siren?," *Critical Quarterly*, 20, No. 3 (1978), 87-88; Jim Hunter, *Tom Stoppard's Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), pp. 55, 188-89.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition of *Jumpers* was printed by Faber and Faber in 1972, the same year as the first National Theatre production. In 1973 Faber issued the play in a revised edition (following, as Stoppard indicates in his 1973 "Post-script" to the "Author's Note," the alteration of the text for the play's revival at the National Theatre). Unless otherwise specified, all references to *Jumpers* in this essay are to the 1973 edition, and are cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Tynan, "Withdrawing with Style from the Chaos," *New Yorker*, 19 Dec. 1977, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> As Tynan is now dead, I was unable to verify this point. The tinkering is so extensive that surely only Tynan or Stoppard himself could have had the authority to alter the text so drastically. Stoppard has assured me in two separate notes, however, that the writing on these pages is not his, which leaves Tynan as the likely author.

I would like to express my gratitude to the National Theatre for having granted me access to behind-the-scenes memos and production notes, and to Tom Stoppard for his kind permission to quote from the original script.

<sup>5</sup> Hunter, *Tom Stoppard's Plays*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Salmon, "Faith in Tom Stoppard," *Queen's Quarterly*, 86 (1979), 219-23; Joan Fitzpatrick Dean, *Tom Stoppard* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri

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Press, 1981), pp. 59–62; Felicia Hardison Londre, *Tom Stoppard* (New York: Ungar, 1981), pp. 51, 53, 64–65; Tom Brassell, “Jumpers: A Happy Marriage,” *Gambit*, 37 (1981), 49–50; Lucinda Paquet Gabbard, *The Stoppard Plays* (Troy, N.Y.: Whitston, 1982), pp. 88–95; Hunter, *Tom Stoppard’s Plays*, pp. 106–61.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Stoppard, “Ambushes for the Audience: Towards a High Comedy of Ideas,” *Theatre Quarterly*, 14 (May 1974), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Stoppard, *Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), pp. 52–53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

# Picaresque Structure and the Angry Young Novel

ANGELA HAGUE

Although John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954), and Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* (1954) were all published several years before the cult of the Angry Young Man appeared in Great Britain, the novels were retrospectively—and erroneously—labeled by some critics as “angry” and their authors grouped with writers of the Angry Movement such as John Osborne and Colin Wilson. Anger did not officially arrive in London until the first production of *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre on May 8, 1956; Osborne's play, along with the publication of Colin Wilson's *The Outsider* on May 26, 1956, appeared to herald a new character in English culture, the working-class or lower-middle-class young man who rebels against the bleakness of the Welfare State and retreats into a self-protective shell of angry vituperation at his surroundings. Wain's Charles Lumley, Amis' Jim Dixon, and Murdoch's Jake Donaghue were then seen as prototypes of the Angry Young Man, despite the protestations of Amis and Wain that they were not particularly enraged about anything. And the error of including Iris Murdoch in this group, who at age thirty-five was neither young, angry, nor male, now seems obvious.

Critics did, however, perceive that the three novels had definite similarities. In a review entitled “Three Comers” in the *Saturday Review*, Bernard Kalb noted that the “most laudatory, if not down right rhapsodic, adjectives” were currently being applied to the novels of Amis, Wain, and Murdoch, and he ironically suggested that “Amis-Murdoch-Wain” were frequently discussed together because “they all (a) went to Oxford, (b) write wittily, (c) teach, and (d) are around thirty

or so."<sup>1</sup> Kalb went on to point out Kingsley Amis' dissatisfaction with being named as part of a "movement" which also included Wain and Murdoch, quoting Amis' statement that discussion of this so-called movement was both inaccurate and harmful. Two years later, however, in an article entitled "Laughter's to Be Taken Seriously," Amis acknowledged that while Wain and Murdoch were "in most ways poles apart," they were similar "in their evident feeling that the novel of a consistent tone, moving through a recognized and restricted mode of emotional keys, was outmoded"; rather, these two novelists have successfully combined "the violent and the absurd, the grotesque and the romantic, the farcical and the horrific within a single novel."<sup>2</sup> In this essay Amis also approvingly noted that postwar literary England appeared to be in what he called a "Fielding revival," an optimistic assessment from a writer who has voiced his reverence for Henry Fielding throughout his career. Although Amis did not specifically mention the picaresque dimension of Wain's and Murdoch's first novels, several other critics of the time commented on the picaresque structure of contemporary British novels.

In an important article on postwar fiction, William Van O'Connor divided the new British novelistic heroes into two groups, the working-class characters of Allan Sillitoe, John Braine, and David Storey; and a second group which he termed the "Lucky Jim" types who, "seedy, ineffectual, comic," are descendants of Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*.<sup>3</sup> He placed Wain's *Hurry on Down*, Murdoch's *Under the Net*, and of course Amis' *Lucky Jim* in this category and commented on an article entitled "These Writers Couldn't Care Less" by V. S. Pritchett in which Pritchett discussed the picaresque structure of several contemporary English novels. In his survey of the new wave of British novelists, a group which included Amis, Wain, Thomas Hinde, and John Braine but omitted Iris Murdoch, Pritchett noted the "neutral" positions of these writers and the private nature of their "rancors" and observed that "a new class of uprooted people" had appeared.

Pritchett compared the "class revolution" of these writers to the social situation in late seventeenth-century England, which he described as the "sour, acrimonious, dissenting, vital, go-getting, new shop-keeping England" of Daniel Defoe; he also perceived a parallel in the "practical, profit recording style" of Defoe, who refused to write "literary" English, with the style of the current English novelists, described by Pritchett as a "desultory vernacular, using every popular circumlocution, or slang phrase, or image to avoid the literary expression of feeling." Pritchett, who explained the picaresque

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dimension of these novels by speculating that their authors were in search of different literary models after abandoning their Victorian and modernist forebears, suggested that these writers had soon realized they had more affinities with the picaresque novelists of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who were also "products of revolution . . . they were engaged in adventure; and the modern adventure was a rambling journey from one conception of society to another."<sup>4</sup>

In *The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel*, Rubin Rabinovitz discusses Amis' and Wain's interest in eighteenth-century literature and the fact that a number of critics, including Walter Allen, have placed Amis and Wain in the picaresque tradition.<sup>5</sup> Robert Hewison, in his cultural survey of postwar Britain, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945–60*, makes this point even more strongly. He includes Iris Murdoch in the group and believes that "it was the first novels of John Wain, Kingsley Amis, and Iris Murdoch that suggested that a different kind of novel was evolving. . . . They are all concerned with the picaresque adventures of a young man, a plot as old as the novel itself."<sup>6</sup> Rather than being united by the common bond of "anger," I believe it is now clear that these three novelists chose to adopt certain characteristics of picaresque fiction. This discussion will look at how and why this occurred.

In recent years, a number of studies of the picaresque novel have appeared which attempt to account for the emergence of the picaro in both literary and cultural terms. A common theme in these critical works is the fact that picaresque literature flourishes when a society is in a state of flux: the picaresque character is a reflection of a society undergoing profound social changes. Alexander Blackburn's *The Myth of the Picaro* (1979) and Richard Bjornson's *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (1977) both discuss the creation of the Spanish picaresque tradition in light of the situation of the *conversos* (converts to Christianity with Jewish ancestors) in sixteenth-century Spain. Persecuted and denied certain rights and privileges in Spanish society such as the holding of Church or civil offices, the *conversos* were forced to hide their Jewish heritage. Consequently, Bjornson defines the essential picaresque situation as the "paradigmatic confrontation between an isolated individual and a hostile society" and describes the *conversos* as individuals who were permanently alienated both from the Jewish culture they had abandoned and the Christian world they had tried to enter.<sup>7</sup>

According to Blackburn, the *conversos* were "marginal men" who

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lived in a world of tension and instability; the typical *converso* was a "member of a caste subject to intense scorn and suspicion, forced into a marginal position within his world, and reacting to persecution in a number of characteristic ways, among them cultivation of irony."<sup>8</sup> Frequently, says Bjornson, these individuals turned to literature because it was a medium in which their frustration and anxiety—and their desire for a more equitable society—could be expressed. Blackburn states that the background and situation of the *conversos* made them predisposed to the bourgeois ideas of individual freedom and character-as-process which later dominated the early British novel; and Bjornson believes that the picaresque novels of Spanish, French, German, and English authors reflect the same attitudes toward social conditions faced by Spanish *conversos*, a situation he describes as "the disintegration of traditional value systems, the rise of bourgeois ideology, and the increasing difficulty of reconciling aspirations for upward social mobility with psychological needs for security and self-respect in a hostile, dehumanizing society."<sup>9</sup>

The social and political situation of postwar England was similar to sixteenth-century Spain and eighteenth-century England in that it was in a state of very rapid social change. The Welfare State's attempts to equalize wealth and provide greater educational opportunities for the working classes led to an entire new generation of writers from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds entering the literary scene in the 1950s, and their work more often than not reflected the social upheaval which surrounded them. Although Amis, Wain, and Murdoch did not come from the working-class backgrounds of John Osborne, Alan Sillitoe, or Shelagh Delaney, their first novels dealt with characters who were distanced from the middle-class world and considered themselves as "outsiders" who had *chosen* their alienation from a certain sector of society. Claudio Guillén's model of the picaresque novel in "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," perhaps the best summary of the characteristics of picaresque literature, will serve as the framework for this discussion of the picaresque structure of these three novels.

Guillén describes the picaro as an individual who is involved in a "tangle," "an economic and social predicament of the most immediate and pressing nature . . . an entanglement with the relative and the contemporaneous."<sup>10</sup> The picaresque novel presents a confrontation between the individual and his environment which is also a conflict between inwardness and experience. In older picaresque literature, the picaro is an "insular, isolated being" who is frequently an orphan who

must function in an environment "for which he is not prepared."<sup>11</sup> He soon discovers that there is no refuge from society and that "social role playing is as ludicrous as it is indispensable"; he can neither join nor actually reject his fellow men and functions as a "half-outsider." The picaresque novel, a "pseudoautobiography" whose first-person narrative is filtered through the sensibility of the picaro-narrator, contains a double perspective of self-concealment and self-revelation; this perspective results from the fact that the language of the picaresque tradition is the instrument of dissimulation and irony. Partial and privileged, the narrator's point of view "offers no synthesis of human life."<sup>12</sup>

The picaro's world view is, however, reflective and philosophical. He is an "ongoing philosopher" who is intent on discovering what is around him and doubting all values and norms. The material level of existence is emphasized in these novels, where existence and subsistence are discussed in terms of "sordid facts, hunger, money" and a profusion of objects and details. In the same way the picaro observes the world collectively in its "social classes, professions, *caractères*, cities, and nations"<sup>13</sup>; and in his travels the picaro moves horizontally in space and vertically through society. As a result, earlier picaresque novels had a loosely constructed episodic narrative.

Although the first novels of Amis, Wain, and Murdoch deviate from Guillén's model in several ways (for example, only *Under the Net* is narrated in first person), each novel does exhibit many important picaresque characteristics. It is understandable why contemporary reviewers and critics believed these novels to be the beginning of a "new type" of English novel that was returning to its eighteenth-century beginnings. In each novel the protagonist is, in Guillén's terms, a "half-outsider" who is both in and out of society, living on the fringes of the middle-class world but involved in forays upon it that usually involve some trickery or deceit.<sup>14</sup> Amis' Jim Dixon is a lower-middle-class young man halfheartedly attempting to adapt to an upper-middle-class academic world whose political, social, and aesthetic values he despises; Wain's Charles Lumley, an Oxbridge graduate in flight from a middle-class upbringing which has, he believes, almost destroyed his capacity for emotion or spontaneity, is seeking the "classless setting of his dreams," to be "rid of his class" while "staying outside the class structure altogether."

Murdoch's Jake Donaghue inhabits the shadowy, classless world of London Bohemia, frequently making jokes about his never revealed social class, which he ambiguously defines as one that makes being "paid off" for a woman impossible but does not preclude the theft of a

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movie-star dog or stealing food and money from a friend's apartment Charles Lumley describes himself as a "fugitive" who is traveling "without a passport," a description similar to Jake's characterization of himself as a "Professional Unauthorized Person." Jim Dixon goes so far as to call himself a "special agent, a picaroon" at one point in *Lucky Jim*. Unlike the characters in the earlier picaresque novels, who are involuntarily thrust into a situation "for which they are not prepared," these individuals have chosen to inhabit a marginal position in regards to society, a position which determines their response to politics, work, art, and relationships with other people.

In "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," V. S. Pritchett commented on the political apathy of the "young intelligentsia" of Britain which "rejects committal," whose "rancors are private."<sup>15</sup> In his contribution to *Declaration* (1957) entitled "Get Out and Push!" film director Lindsay Anderson, perhaps the angriest of the angries, attacked Amis and Wain for their "neutral" political positions, describing them as "anti-idealist, anti-emotional, and tepid or evasive about their social commitments" and their political attitudes as a "disavowal of responsibility."<sup>16</sup> Although Jim Dixon reacts resentfully to Bertrand Welch's assumption of social superiority and privilege, he espouses very few specific political beliefs in the novel, retreating into the philosophy of "self-interest" that Amis commends in his Fabian pamphlet *Socialism and the Intellectuals*. Charles Lumley reacts against political principles and any kind of political idealism, stating that "the men of the thirties failed" because of their desire to be one of "the People," a desire that, if fulfilled, "would have made their lives hell."<sup>17</sup> Charles rejects both Freudian concepts of the "inner man" and Marxist ideas about "man in society" and seeks instead a completely personal, individualized life-style that avoids any taint of what he calls "the corporate life." Murdoch's Jake Donaghue is equally apolitical, sympathizing in principle with Lefty Todd, the head of the National Independent Socialist Party, but steadfastly refusing to join in any political action. Speaking of the Movement poets, who also included Amis and Wain, Robert Hewison has noted that "Commitment of any kind was considered dubious. . . . Critical and political caution went hand in hand."<sup>18</sup>

Claudio Guillén, who believes that this lack of political or social commitment is particularly characteristic of twentieth-century picaresque literature, says that the picaresque tends to reappear during days of "irony and discouragement," when times are less favorable to the "plans of the bold individual."<sup>19</sup> Under these conditions the picaresque novel communicates a "devaluation of courage," and he observes that in

recent years a "loss of gravity" has been evident in writers of picaresque fiction: "It is no longer fashionable to make declarations concerning the future of man. Threatened with events which no one controls, the novelist hesitates to show men truly risking, or even shaping, their own lives."<sup>20</sup> Fate has always played a large part in the philosophical assumptions of the picaresque, and its survival in contemporary picaresque literature is obvious in Jim Dixon's reliance on his "luck," Charles Lumley's hope that "chance would decide to favour him" rather than dealing him its usual deathblow, and Jake Donaghue's almost mystical belief in his "destiny." An important question, of course, is *why* postwar writers, in light of the new educational and social opportunities provided by the Butler Education Act and the Welfare State, felt this discouragement and lack of free will in their personal lives. V. S. Pritchett's statement that "They have been given great advantages, but there is no opportunity to exploit them" provides a partial answer, for certainly these writers depict a world in which education is often positively detrimental to happiness because there is no appropriate social or career niche awaiting the recipients of Welfare State generosity.<sup>21</sup> In his *Declaration* essay "Along the Tightrope" John Wain makes this point clear:

When I wrote *Hurry on Down*, the main problem which had presented itself in my own existence was the young man's problem of how to adapt himself to "life," in the sense of an order external to himself, already there when he appeared on the scene, and not necessarily disposed to welcome him; the whole being complicated by the fact that in our civilization there is an unhealed split between the educational system and the assumptions that actually underlie daily life.<sup>22</sup>

Pritchett sums up the situation more succinctly in his statement that the hero of the new English novel is "training for a life in a society which is breaking up,"<sup>23</sup> just as Robert Hewison notes that the difficulty of being a realistic fiction writer in 1950s Britain was that "reality was bleak."<sup>24</sup>

As a result, these three novels contain a similar distrust of the work ethic, although "work" is valued in its less exalted forms. The real curse of capitalism, says Jake Donaghue, is that "work is deadly," but Jake, like Charles Lumley, takes real pleasure in manual labor. In fact, it is only work which aspires to intellectual or social status—work in the province of the established society these characters wish to avoid—that is devalued in these novels; not surprisingly, *Lucky Jim* and *Hurry on Down* present scathing portraits of academicians. "Honest" work, that is, physical labor, is presented as morally edifying, in contradistinction to

attitudes toward work in more traditional picaresque literature. Jake's and Charles's stints as hospital porters are not simply homages to Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, although Murdoch acknowledges her debt to this novel in the opening pages of *Under the Net*; instead, these interludes furnish Jake and Charles with a temporary protection from the chaos of the outside world and a chance to experience a separate and quite arbitrarily social hierarchy based on necessity and efficiency rather than the traditionally structured society outside the hospital. For both characters their hospital "stays" are part of a psychological healing process that takes place in spite of the fact that, as Guillén and Stuart Miller observe, in picaresque literature such protected havens from the outside world always prove to be temporary.<sup>25</sup>

Although Jim Dixon is the most aggressively anti-intellectual of the three characters, he does not leave the university environment to experience a "real life" job; Amis leaves the nature of his new employment at the end of the novel purposely vague, probably because it will involve Jim with the "arty world" for which he claims to have so much contempt. Rather than showing his character's need for an idyll of physical labor which will enable him to reenter the outside world, Amis is content with attacking the enclosed society of snobbishness and eccentricity that the university represents.

The distrust of political commitment and "gainful employment" that characterizes these novels has its corollary in their contemptuous attitudes toward art. *Lucky Jim* shocked contemporary readers in its references to "filthy Mozart," "Brahms rubbish," and other "Teutonic bores," and in the same way Charles Lumley speaks slightly of the "intolerable prosings of Wordsworth, and the namby-pamby dribblings of Shelley." Both novels also contain comic caricatures of artist-figures: the portrait of Bertrand Welch in *Lucky Jim* is of a self-obsessed and mediocre artist who uses his "profession" as an excuse to issue dicta on every subject; in *Hurry on Down* Edwin Froulish, the aggressively eccentric would-be Joycean novelist, reads aloud a section from his novel which allows Wain to parody the self-indulgence of high modernist literature. Froulish and Welch, both self-styled romantic artist-poseurs, take every opportunity to denounce those who question their aesthetic assumptions or achievements. In both instances artists are presented as pompous, self-aggrandizing elitists whose attitude toward creative activity can be described only as Mandarin. Although Jake Donaghue, who goes on to become a creative writer at the close of *Under the Net*, is less suspicious of aesthetic values, he too refuses to write

during the course of the story and at one point informs the reader that he will "do anything rather than creative work."<sup>26</sup>

However, as Stuart Miller observes, the art theme is an important element in picaresque literature, although the picaro is rarely an artist in the traditional sense of the word.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the picaro frequently becomes a "gratuitous trickster" interested only in "art for art's sake" whose practical jokes and manipulations of reality function as the outlet for his aesthetic activities. Art, in these three novels, is life: the practical jokes of Jim Dixon and Charles Lumley, like Jake Donaghue's petty thefts and London escapades, show these characters extending an imaginative control over their surroundings which does not, however, involve them in dealings with the established world of "high art." Just as status-oriented or intellectually oriented work is anathema to these young men, so traditionally reverenced art forms and values are viewed with suspicion. The true picaresque novel, says Blackburn, contains a "direct devaluation of cultural content,"<sup>28</sup> and all of these novels reveal this characteristic most clearly in their attitudes toward traditional art forms.

The typical picaro is as alienated from other individuals as he is from politics, established work, or artistic activity. J. B. Priestley, in an article entitled "Thoughts in the Wilderness," noted that the protagonists of the new English novels were "perhaps the most isolated and loneliest characters in all fiction."<sup>29</sup> Traditionally the picaro is, as Guillén emphasizes, a "half-outsider" who is permanently estranged both from society in general and the individuals who make it up. Blackburn defines the fundamental situation of the literary picaro as "the loneliness of an individual isolated *within* society," a definition which accurately describes the three characters discussed here.<sup>30</sup> Jim Dixon and Charles Lumley lack close friends or confidants, and although Jake Donaghue has that rare possession in picaresque literature, a sidekick, he admits that his relationship with Peter O'Finney is not an equitable one. Rather, Jake says that "I count Finn as an inhabitant of my universe, and cannot conceive that he has one containing me"<sup>31</sup> and confesses ashamedly at the novel's conclusion that he has never taken the time to know Finn. Relationships with women follow the same pattern in these novels: there is little emotional or sexual interaction between the characters and the women who generally function as objects of a rather disorganized "quest." Christine Callaghan, Veronica Roderick, and Anna Quentin, all of whom "belong" in some fashion to men more wealthy or more powerful than

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the protagonists and are inaccessible to them, provide little opportunity for the emotional development of the picaro-protagonists.

In fact, Jim, Charles, and Jake all voice fear or distrust of women, possibly because they represent the potential for emotional involvement, social stability, and the status-quo involvements which these characters, particularly Charles Lumley and Jake Donaghue, are trying to avoid. Guillén's observation that the classic picaro is an orphan permanently cut off from any security the past may represent is also relevant to these novels, for in each instance the characters appear to have been "dropped" into the present with little contact with family members or connections with the past. Jake Donaghue once vaguely refers to his parents as his "elders," and Jim Dixon, like Charles Lumley, casually mentions his parents in passing, but no information about these individuals or any siblings is ever given in these novels. Past familial or social experiences seem to have had little meaning for these characters and do not furnish any kind of stability or continuous background for them.

The typical picaro's problem with identity is partially a result of his dissociation from the past. In the opening pages of *Under the Net* Jake Donaghue ironically says that he is "trying to work out" who he is, a confession equally applicable to Jim Dixon and Charles Lumley, both of whom excel at disguise and role-playing because of the fluidity of their personalities. Jake's early fear that Hugo Belfounder's personality could easily "swallow" him up is paralleled by the fact that Jim and Charles seem to be at the mercy of their impersonations of other people. Jim Dixon's famous face-making and his Merrie England speech, in which he unconsciously and uncontrollably begins to mimic his colleagues, are similar to Charles Lumley's tendency to imitate film stars, sometimes against his will. Stuart Miller interprets the picaro's protean personality in extremely negative terms and believes that the picaro's ability to alter his persona with such rapidity and success is due to the "internal chaos" of his personality. He calls this process a "sacrifice" and blames it to a degree on "the pressures of society, Fortune, and accident" which never permit a character to "rest in a single posture."<sup>32</sup> Blackburn agrees with this interpretation, saying that the common denominator of the picaresque myth is the "disintegration" of an orthodox tradition and "the collapse of personality or its submission to an experience of nothingness."<sup>33</sup> But like modern literature's most famous picaro, Thomas Mann's Felix Krull, these characters use their protean personalities as weapons, retaining an intrinsic core of individual

consciousness while assuming roles and disguises in order to further their ends, which are frequently aesthetic as well as practical.

The picaresque dimension of the first novels of Amis, Wain, and Murdoch was a creative response to the problematical situation which faced young writers in the 1950s. The new cultural and educational opportunities offered by the Welfare State were counterbalanced by the still traditional and class-bound society which was providing these opportunities; not surprisingly, these writers felt themselves to be in a confused and "marginal" situation both socially and aesthetically. Their rejection of Romantic and high modernist aesthetics led them to search for literary models which could better express the tensions their fictions embodied; the picaresque tradition, with its focus on the "outsider" protagonist in conflict with a ruling social hierarchy and its emphasis on the concrete details of everyday life, provided the appropriate vehicle. The picaro, who survives by exile, cunning, and imagination, was the perfect prototype for writers desiring a literary forebear untainted by Romantic, modernist, or existential trappings. His reappearance in early postwar British fiction mirrored, as it did in sixteenth-century Spain and eighteenth-century England, the confusion and energy both of contemporary society and its fiction writers.

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Kalb, "Three Comers," *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1955, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsley Amis, "Laughter's to Be Taken Seriously," *New York Times Book Review*, 7 July 1957, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> William Van O'Connor, "Two Types of Heroes in Post-war British Fiction," *PMLA*, 77 (Mar. 1962), 168-74.

<sup>4</sup> V. S. Pritchett, "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," *New York Times Book Review*, 28 Apr. 1957, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Rubin Rabinovitz, *The Reaction against Experiment in the English Novel, 1950-1960* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hewison, *In Anger: British Culture in the Cold War 1945-60* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 15-16.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro: Continuity and Transformation of the Picaresque Novel 1554-1954* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Bjornson, *The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Claudio Guillén, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," in his *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), p. 77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> In *The Picaresque Saint: Representative Figures in Contemporary Fiction* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959), R. W. B. Lewis discusses the picaro in similar terms, describing picaresque characters as "outsiders who share . . . outcasts who enter in," and as "criminals to be pursued, escapees on the run, strangers in an alien world" (p. 33).

<sup>15</sup> Pritchett, "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Lindsay Anderson, "Get Out and Push!" in Tom Maschler, ed., *Declaration* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1957), pp. 147, 149.

<sup>17</sup> John Wain, *Hurry on Down* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books, 1953), p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 119.<sup>19</sup> Guillén, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," p. 105.<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.<sup>21</sup> Pritchett, "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," p. 38.<sup>22</sup> John Wain, "Along the Tightrope," in Maschler, ed., *Declaration*, p. 83.<sup>23</sup> Pritchett, "These Writers Couldn't Care Less," p. 39.<sup>24</sup> Hewison, *In Anger*, p. 125.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve Press, 1967), p. 88.

<sup>26</sup> Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net* (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 18.<sup>27</sup> Miller, *The Picaresque Novel*, pp. 65–66.<sup>28</sup> Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro*, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> J. B. Priestley, "Thoughts in the Wilderness," *New Statesman and Nation*, 26 July 1954, p. 73.

<sup>30</sup> Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro*, p. 24.<sup>31</sup> Murdoch, *Under the Net*, p. 5.<sup>32</sup> Miller, *The Picaresque Novel*, p. 71.<sup>33</sup> Blackburn, *The Myth of the Picaro*, p. 22.

# “The Radiant Gist”: “The Poetry Hidden in the Prose” of Williams’ Paterson

BRIAN A. BREMEN

In “How to Read,” Ezra Pound distinguishes prose as being “less highly charged” than poetry, yet he sees that “during the last century or century and a half prose has . . . arisen to challenge the poetic pre-eminence.”<sup>1</sup> Pound elsewhere obliges us to learn “that prose is as precious and as much to be sought after as verse, even in its shreds and patches” and that “one of the finest chapters in English [may be] hidden in a claptrap novel.”<sup>2</sup> “Great literature,” Pound claims, “is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree,” and those who discover “a mode or process” to do so received Pound’s highest praise; they are “the inventors.”<sup>3</sup> William Carlos Williams borrows Pound’s terminology in a section of Book II of *Paterson*, in an imitation of Pound’s Canto 45, in order to extol the importance of invention. Williams asserts that

without invention the line  
will never again take on its ancient  
divisions when the word, a supple word,  
lived in it.<sup>4</sup>

What Williams means here is, in part, explained in his introduction to Byron Vazakas’ *Transfigured Night* (1946), a piece written at the same time that he was working on Book II of *Paterson*. Williams praises Vazakas as “that important phenomenon among writers, an inventor.”<sup>5</sup> Vazakas had discovered a new poetic line, one which broke the bonds of conventional measure and ignored the trite forms in which poetry, for Williams, had been mired. Vazakas was an American who had “stayed

home," "ignored the universities," and found a line that allowed "room in which to develop the opportunities of a new language, a line loose as Whitman's, but measured as his was not . . . resembling, however vaguely, a musical bar."<sup>6</sup> Vazakas' line was a jazz-like fusion of prose and poetry, and it "came to symbolize for Williams the gist of the new form he had been searching so long for."<sup>7</sup> His discovery of Vazakas in 1944 coincided with his completing *The Wedge*, his having seen M.G.M.'s *Madame Curie*, and his continued reading of *Finnegans Wake*, and it catalyzed the wealth of material that Williams had already accumulated for his epic—the correspondences with David Lyle and Marcia Nardi, the hundreds of historical documents and newspaper reports about the region, as well as the shorter anticipations of *Paterson* which had appeared throughout Williams' earlier poetry. Now Williams had "a luminosity of elements" which enabled him "to dissect away / the block and leave / a separate metal" (p. 176) that was to become his own work of invention—*Paterson*.

Vazakas' new, more musical measure, his prose/poetic line, and his choice of subject matter struck deep, sympathetic chords in Williams and presented him with a concrete example of what he had been trying to do in his badly stalled epic. Here was a key, a way to give form to the misshapen giant of a man who was a city. Williams' identification with Vazakas and the way in which *Transfigured Night* aided in the delineation of *Paterson* become clearer in the following excerpt from Williams' "Introduction":

Vazakas doesn't select his material. What is there to select? It is. Like the newspaper that takes things as it finds them,—mutilated and deformed, but drops what it finds as it was, unchanged in all its deformity and mutilation—the poet, challenging the event, recreates it as of whence it sprang from among men and women, and makes a new world of it . . . Night transfigured; this is Vazakas.<sup>8</sup>

As in much of his correspondence during this period, Williams here is talking more to himself than he is about another poet.<sup>9</sup> The words "Night transfigured; this is Vazakas" recall Williams' notion of the "night mind" which he had developed in "The Importance of Place":

But it is none of these. It is one: all tentatives fit into it, not it into them. It is particularly not "the past" out of which knowledge or consciousness going up proceeds, leaving it behind. It exists co-incidentally with consciousness, systems, is not escaped.

Objectified, it is place itself—on which all arguments fall.  
(EK, p. 133)

The past, place, and chaos is an apt description of the state of Paterson in 1944, a "night mind" of subject matter waiting for Williams to transform it. By 1942 Williams had compiled "a hundred pages or so" of prose mixed with verse, and he had written to Robert McAlmon that the first part of *Paterson* should have been "nearly finished now" (SL, pp. 215–16). By early 1944, Williams had gathered almost all of the materials he would use in *Paterson I*, and most of what would make up the rest of Books II–IV.<sup>10</sup> Still, Williams was unable to coalesce this material into an acceptable form until he had seen what Vazakas had, in part, accomplished. Vazakas' poetry seemed "to occur in the prose as if hidden there,"<sup>11</sup> and in the notions of fusing poetry and prose, of "recreating the subject matter that is taken as it is found," and of inventing a new line. Williams had found his own way of "challenging the event" and making "a new world of it." Williams had discovered a way to reconcile the poetry with the prose, allowing each to enclose the other, giving *Paterson* the rich, complicated movement and pattern it required.

In order to understand this idea more fully, we must first look at some of Williams' earlier theories about the differences between poetry and prose. Thinking about the distinctions between prose and poetry and the ways in which they combined occupied a great deal of Williams' time before he wrote *Paterson*. Williams had read *Aucassin and Nicolette* with H. D. while he was still in medical school and remembered discovering "the wonders of . . . the prose and verse alternating" (A, p. 52). Both *Spring and All* (1923) and *The Descent of Winter* (1928) used this alternating prose/verse structure, and *The Wedge* (1944) was also to have contained both poetry and prose until Louis Zukofsky, in editing the work, removed all of the prose and Williams ultimately agreed with his revisions. In his "Introduction" to *The Wedge*, however—"a piece of forthright prose" which Williams considered "an explanation of my poetic creed at the time—for all time as far as that goes" (IWWP, p. 70)—Williams discusses the distinction between prose and poetry:

Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matter like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to a perfect economy. As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises.

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A bit further on, in a passage which anticipates what he was to write about Vazakas, Williams states:

When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them—without distortion which would mar their exact significances—into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. It isn't what he *says* that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity. (SE, pp. 256–57).

What happened in *Paterson* was exactly “a development along these lines,” the invention of an “intimate form” that enabled Williams both to blur the distinctions of poetry and prose and to give the language of his epic its highest dignity. Previous to *Paterson*, prose had been for Williams a form quite distinct from poetry. In *Spring and All*, Williams explains:

Or better: prose has to do with the fact of an emotion; poetry has to do with the dynamization of emotion into a separate form. This is the force of imagination.

prose: statement of facts concerning emotions, intellectual states, data of all sorts—technical expositions, jargon, of all sorts—fictional and other—

poetry: new form dealt with as a reality in itself.

The form of prose is the accuracy of its subject matter—how best to expose the multiform phases of its material

the form of poetry is related to the movements of the imagination revealed in words—or whatever it may be—the cleavage is complete

I, pp. 133–34

Despite this “cleavage” that separates prose, poetry, and “all of experience,” Williams is obviously toying with the imaginative possibilities of prose here. What Williams is writing is not strict prose, but a highly charged language that both breaks down our traditional notions of prose and yet remains distinct from what he calls “poetry.” He continues to play with these ideas in a passage in *Spring and All* which follows his most famous poem, “The Red Wheelbarrow”:

Prose relieved of extraneous, unrelated values must return to its only purpose; to clarity to enlighten the understanding. There is

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no form to prose but that which depends on clarity. If prose is not accurately adjusted to the exposition of facts it does not exist—Its form is that alone. To penetrate everywhere with enlightenment—

Poetry is something quite different. Poetry has to do with the crystallization [sic] of the imagination—the perfection of new forms as additions to nature—Prose may follow to enlighten but poetry— (I, p. 140)

While prose differs from poetry in both form and intention, the answer to the question "is what Williams has written prose?" remains one of the "difficulties" with which Williams says we are left, and these difficult distinctions apply particularly to the prose of *Paterson*. It is easy to read these prose passages as consistent with the above statements and, consequently, to maintain the notion of a cleavage between the poetry and the prose in the poem. It seems necessary for both poet and reader to leap successfully, unlike Sam Patch or Sarah Cummings, from "prose to the process of the imagination" in order to break up the staleness that is "the greatest characteristic of the present age" and to free the language of *Paterson*. To most critics who have examined the prose passages of *Paterson*: "They are the divisions and imbalances of his whole concept, made weak by pity, flouting desire; they are—No ideas but in the facts . . ." (P, p. 28).

In particular, Ralph Nash, in "The Use of Prose in 'Paterson,'" classifies the prose passages as either "the prose of Contemporary Fact" or "the prose of Historical Fact," and he sees their function largely in terms of providing "counterpoint" and "documentation" for the rest of the poem.<sup>12</sup> These passages do appear as factual documents, separated from the rest of the poem by a different typeset, and Nash's distinctions are significant ones. Moreover, according to Williams' definitions in *Spring and All* and *The Wedge*, the prose passages should "follow to enlighten." Still, Nash takes the prose passages to be "unshaped blocks of foreign material":

The direct presentation of these fragments, *without their being shaped into the rhythms and diction of the surrounding poetry*, is of course an artistic device. No doubt Williams intends it partly as a forceful marriage of his poem's world with that world of reality from which he is fearful of divorcing himself. But it has also a special effect of presenting the Poet as Recorder, relatively detached and objective, reading his morning mail as he might read a history of Paterson, acting somewhat as the scientist might in checking his guesses against the facts. (My emphasis)<sup>13</sup>

As we will see below, however, these passages have been shaped,

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and while they do provide a kind of counterpoint to the rest of the poem, they also contain the “radiant gist” of the most lyrical passages. *Paterson* asserts that “they are—No ideas but / in facts,” but it also tells us more emphatically to “—Say it, no ideas but in things—” (*P*, p. 6), and the prose passages are both facts and things. We need to see the poetry that seems “to occur in the prose as if hidden there” in order to understand *Paterson* fully. We must, as Williams also said in *Spring and All*, take “the jump between fact and the imaginative reality” and recognize that “the study of all human activity is the delineation of the crescence and ebb of this force, shifting from class to class and location to location—rhythm: the wave rhythm of Shakespeare watching clowns and kings sliding into nothing” (*I*, p. 135). For the poet of the poem, the morning mail is a history of Paterson, and it discloses the rhythms and measure that make clear the language of the man who is a city. These rhythms in *Paterson* are a “crescence and ebb” from prose to poetry, from fact to thing, from violence to beauty, but none of these forces is pure. Each is “an / interpenetration, both ways,” and all are Paterson. As these rhythms amass, “rolling / up the sum, by defective means” (*P*, p. 3), moving from the most prosaic description of an artesian well to the most lyrical evocation of “beautiful thing,” we find that, as Williams himself once said, “one plus one plus one plus one plus one equals not five but one.”<sup>14</sup>

The prose passages in *Paterson*, both documents and letters, fall into four categories: 1) those which Williams quotes verbatim; 2) those which he revises slightly; 3) those which he alters radically; and 4) those which he creates himself (very few in number). I actually suspect that there is some “factual document” behind all of the prose passages, as each one seems to have been selected for, or shaped to evoke, a particular rhythm or measure. For example, even the Sarah Cumming passage, quoted nearly verbatim from Barber’s *Historical Collections of New Jersey*, contains subtle changes which affect the character of Sarah Cumming, the reasons for her “fall,” and the flow of the prose.<sup>15</sup> Williams’ insertion of ellipses into the passage, even where he makes no omissions from the original, alters slightly the rhythms of the account and changes the voice of the narrator from the stiff more knowing tone of the original to a softer, yet still removed, narrator who drifts off into his own brief lapses of silence. This kind of “metrical shaping,” however, is most apparent in passages like the Ramapos passage (*P*, p. 12), where Williams has successfully captured the rhythms of the historical works he had been reading.<sup>16</sup> The major effect of this shaping is to give this passage a particular voice, and here the voice, as it is in all

of the documents, is that of the detached, authoritative observer—a historian or a journalist. This type of writing corresponds to one of the “two phases of language” that Williams discusses in “The Logic of Modern Letters, Primary” in *The Embodiment of Knowledge*:

Language is again divided according to its use into two main phases. 1. That by which it is made secondary to the burden of ideas—information, what not—for service to philosophy, science, journalism. This includes the gross use of language. And 2. where language is itself primary and ideas subservient to language. This is the field of letters, whence the prevalence of fiction and the preeminence of poetry in this division.

(EK, p. 141)

Williams goes on to say that these two “major uses of language” should complement each other in “a well-adjusted intelligence,” but that “the proper interrelationship between the two is hardly understood at all. The practice of letters is neglected with serious results—sensed but dumbly even by the ablest” (EK, p. 141).

The notion of these “two phases” is echoed in the prose description of the Ramapos, and, consequently, we are forced to consider their “proper interrelationship”: “If there was not beauty, there was a strangeness and a bold association of wild and cultured life grew up together in the Ramapos: two phases” (P, p. 12). The two phases here—“a bold association of wild and cultured life”—do, as William Sankey points out, also have a relationship to the two phases of culture that Williams discusses in “The American Background,”<sup>17</sup> and their later representation in the perverted “Idyl” of Corydon and Phyllis (also from Ramapo) is a significant continuation of both the economic and the sexual themes of the poem. When we put these lines back in their immediate context, however, the relationship between these “two phases” and the “two phases of language” becomes clearer, as does the relationship between the prose and the poetry.

The verse starting with “They begin!” (P, p. 11) gives us images of infertility and dissatisfaction, and it ends with:

The language, the language  
fails them  
They do not know the words  
or have not  
the courage to use them

—girls from  
families that have decayed and  
taken to the hills: no words.

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They may look at the torrent in  
their minds  
And it is foreign to them.

They turn their backs  
and grow faint—but recover!  
Life is sweet  
they say: the language!  
—the language  
is divorced from their minds,  
the language . . . the language!

The association between “the language” and the “two phases” may seem a bit tentative here, but we need to remember the complicated, “metamorphic” relationships that run throughout the poem.<sup>18</sup> Tracing back the antecedents to the pronoun “they” in the above lines gives us not only “the girls,” but also those “few” who went “to the coast,” and even the unpolinated seeds that the “tongue of the bee” missed. Moving forward into the prose passage, we see also that the “girls from / families that have decayed and / taken to the hills” could also refer to the descendants of “Jackson’s Whites” who “ran in the woods” (*P*, p. 12). Further, the “They” in “They begin!” recalls the previous lines—“Around the falling waters the Furies hurl! / Violence gathers, spins in their heads summoning / them”—and here the “they” seems to be the crowd of “They craved the miraculous!” But the intervening prose passages complicate the easy identification of an antecedent. “They” could just as easily be the huge “twaalf,” abundant in the Falls basin, or it could be the heterogeneous 1870 population of 33,579.

Fortunately, this “they” in “They craved the miraculous!” has already been somewhat defined in the preceding lines:

Say it! No ideas but in things. Mr.  
Paterson has gone away  
to rest and write. Inside the bus one sees  
his thoughts sitting and standing. His thoughts alight  
and scatter—

Who are these people (how complex  
the mathematic) among whom I see myself  
in the regularly ordered plate glass of  
his thoughts, glimmering before shoes and bicycles?  
They walk incommunicado, the  
equation is beyond solution, yet  
its sense is clear—that they may live  
his thought is listed in the Telephone

## Directory—

(P, p. 9)

The "complex mathematic," the unexplained shift from "thoughts" to "thought" and the mysterious "I" all recall that "equation beyond solution" that Williams gave in "Reply to a Young Scientist"—"one plus one plus one plus one equals not five but one." Consequently, all of the characters and objects of *Paterson* spill in and out of each other, packed tight with detail like the image of the "multiple seed" (P, p. 4), and ultimately reduce themselves to one—Paterson—the poet, the city, the woman, the crowd, the park, the falls, and so on. The complications in antecedent caused by the intervening prose passages merely add to this list.

We can begin to see, then, that these prose passages are not merely facts or historical information for the rest of the poem, but also contain "ideas in things" which interact with the sections of verse. The "two phases" of life which grew up together in the Ramapos reflect the wildness of the poetic imagination and the culture of prose which is "adjusted" for service to journalism and science. Paradoxically, it is in just this "accurate adjustment to the exposition of fact" that these prose documents become parts of the second phase of language, "where language is itself primary and ideas subservient to language." In particular, three ideas central to *Paterson* become subservient to the frozen, historical prose of this passage—the tranquil wildness of the common "things" found at Ringwood, the violence of the hangings of the traitors at Pompton and of the sixty Tuscaroras who had massacred a white settlement in Tennessee, and the economics of slavery and of "providing women" for soldiers.

The prose rhythms which Williams re-creates here divorce the emotions associated with these ideas from the facts which describe them. Consequently, the prose becomes a kind of poetic line in which the "force of the imagination," the "night mind" of place, remains frozen, much in the same way that the "young and latest" queen is frozen in the *Geographic* picture, or Sam Patch is frozen in a block of ice. The "movements of imagination revealed in words" which are related to the form of poetry, here take the form of prose, a prose which overwhelms their ability to crystallize and break free.

Williams' use of the Ramapo document establishes a concrete example of the question posed in the very first line of the poem—"Rigor of beauty is in the quest. But how will you find beauty / when it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance?" One answer is provided in the manuscripts of *Paterson*— "It is not in the things about us unless

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transposed there by our employment. Make it free, then, by the art you have to enter those starved and broken pieces.”<sup>19</sup> The way in which Williams uses his art to begin to free the beauty is to establish a cycle which echoes the movement of the Falls and runs throughout the poem. Having delineated the giants of the place—the poet figures of dogs, Paterson, Peter the dwarf, and Sam Patch; the wife/flower/multiple seed images of Garrett Mountain, Cress, the first wife, and Sarah Cumming—Williams tells us that “Divorce is / the sign of knowledge in our time” and begins this cyclical attempt at freedom, only to fail. This “history (within the mind)” of a flower within a flower, which grins “not for the sake of the encyclopedia” remains hidden from us, and the violence suggested at its discovery never takes place. Consequently, the “bird alighting . . . falls forward . . . among the twigs” and “The horse, the bull / the whole din of fracturing thought / as it falls tinnily to nothing upon the streets” combine with other “things” in:

Pithy philosophies of  
daily exits and entrances, with books  
propping up one end of the shaky table—  
The vague accuracies of events dancing two  
and two with language which they  
forever surpass—and dawns  
tangled in darkness—

(P, p. 23)

The frozen language of the prose history which the beauty of “things” will “forever surpass,” the divorce of feeling from fact, and the silence caused by the failure of language, all combine here to thwart the attempt at fusion and communication:

we sit and talk  
I wish to be with you abed, we two  
as if the bed were the bed of a stream  
— I have much to say to you

(P, p. 24)

But “the stream has no language,” and the “silence speaks of the giants / who have died in the past and have / returned to those scenes unsatisfied” (P, p. 25). We end this section with the cold, intellectual voice of Edward Dahlberg, who separates himself from Williams and “won’t weep over Poe, or Rilke, or Dickinson, or Gogol,” while he turns away “the few waifs and Ishmaels of the spirit in this country.” Even though he has said that the “artist is an Ishmael,” for Dahlberg, “Ishmael means affliction” (P, pp. 28–29).

Freeing the language, freeing the beauty—the poetry which lies hidden in the prose—can only be achieved through violence: the violence of the white men which leads to the forming of Jackson's Whites as well as the violence of Williams' disruption of meter in creating his "relatively stable foot."<sup>20</sup> For this reason many of the prose documents contain extremely violent events, and this violence becomes all the more brutal in the cold, factual way in which it is related. As Williams writes in "Letter to an Australian Editor":

Destruction, according to the Babylonia[n] order of creation, comes before creation . . . The same today. We must be destructive first to free ourselves from forms accreting to themselves forms we despise. Where does the past lodge in the older forms? Tear it out.<sup>21</sup>

The poetry we need to hear in these prose documents is a violent poetry of people divorced from feelings and things; a separation, a dissonance that leads to the most chilling acts of murder. This violence, however, is just as much the violence of the contrast "between the mythic beauty of the Falls and Mountain and the industrial hideousness" of Paterson that leads Williams to invent the "variable foot" of the "three stress line" in writing "The descent beckons" (*P*, pp. 77–79)—Williams' "solution of the problem of modern verse" as well as one of the most lyrical and hopeful sections in the entire poem. This "new measure," which begins Book II, is preceded by a short prose piece describing the violence of an earthquake on December 7 (Pearl Harbor Day), 1737, and by Williams' own "reply to the Greek and Latin" of Eliot and Pound "with the bare hands"—a classical justification for a "Deformed verse . . . suited for a deformed morality"—a change in meter "more within the sphere of prose and common speech" which did the "utmost violence to the rhythmical structure" (*P*, p. 40).

The relationship between the frozen violence of the prose documents and the violence needed to free the language appears explicitly in a scatological joke in the second section of Book IV. In the middle of the verse section about Madame Curie, herself a combination of the science of prose and the poetry of invention, Williams quotes Chaucer's Sir Thopas:

Namoor—  
Thy drasty rymyng is not  
worth a toord  
—and Chaucer seemed to think so too for he stopped and went  
on in prose

(*P*, p. 177)

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Williams follows these prose/verse lines with a verbatim copy of a section of a 1950 JAMA article about the reporting of "diarrheal disturbances without fear of economic reprisal," suggesting in a crude way how the "constipated" language could also be able to "flow" more freely (Williams uses these exact words in a 1942 letter to Charles Abbott about the problems he had been having in arranging the material for *Paterson*).<sup>22</sup>

A more serious use of this violent prose comes in the last section of Book IV. In this section, which begins "Haven't you forgotten your virgin purpose, / the language?" (*P*, p. 187), Williams includes the bloody murder of Jonathan Hopper, a brief section urging to "Kill the explicit sentence . . . and expand our meaning" (*P*, p. 189), the exhumed body of Peter the Dwarf (*P*, p. 193), a letter from Ginsburg about a taproom "filled with gas, ready to explode . . . that is really at the heart of what is to be known" (*P*, p. 194), and perhaps the most brutal murder of all, the killing of six-month old Nancy Goodell by her father.

Williams' question of language and violence is the poet's question paraphrased in Allen Tate's translation of *The Vigil of Venus*—"When shall I like Philomena the swallow suffer violence and be moved to sing?"<sup>23</sup>—a question also alluded to at the end of Eliot's *Waste Land*. For Williams, though, this violence is "at the base of modern letters—of modernism"—and it is at the heart of the prose works Williams most admired, those of Gertrude Stein and James Joyce: "It is to divorce words from the enslavement of the prevalent clichés that all violent torsions (Stein, Joyce) have occurred; violent in direct relation to the gravity and success of their enslavements" (*EK*, p. 143).

This cycle of prose violence to poetic freedom is nowhere more clear than at the close of Book IV. Just before the newspaper report on the murder of Nancy Goodell, which occurred on Williams' sixtieth birthday, Williams "shifts his change" into the prose-like lines he had learned from Vazakas. This final section, separated from the rest of Book IV by a series of heavy dots, begins with a continuation of what appears to be a mixture of historical and personal reminiscences but, in fact, is actually a pastiche created from a historical prose document. What Williams has done in these lines is to free the "things" of Longwell's *A Little Story of Old Paterson As Told By An Old Man* by giving them a new measure (see Appendix). Ironically, it is just this type of line that Randall Jarrell criticized for being "exactly like the stuff you produce when you are demonstrating to a class that any prose whatsoever can be converted into four-stress accentual verse simply by

inserting line endings every four stresses.”<sup>24</sup> Though Williams nearly does just this, particularly in the verses about the circus (*P*, p. 197), the effect of these lines is much greater than Jarrell assumes. By breaking up the language of Longwell, Williams reveals the bits of poetry hidden within the sentimental prose. The “old names” are now remembered, and the beauty of “things” crystallizes in the images of the circus and its giant candles, and of the birds who no longer “fall forward nevertheless / among the twigs” (*P*, p. 23), but rather “flutter and bathe in the little / pool in the rocks formed by the falling / mist—of the Falls” (*P*, p. 198).

In this section taken from Longwell, Williams’ use of prose provides an interesting comparison with Pound’s working in of prose within the *Cantos*. In “Excerpts from a Critical Sketch: A Draft of XXX Cantos by Ezra Pound” (1931), Williams says of Pound’s work:

It is that the material is so molded that it is changed in *kind* from other statement. It is a *sort* beyond measure.

The measure is an inevitability, an unavoidable accessory after the fact. If one move, if one run, if one seize up a material—it cannot avoid having a measure, it cannot avoid a movement which clings to it—as the movement of a horse becomes part of the rider also—

That is the way Pound’s verse impresses me and why he can include pieces of prose and have them still part of a *poem*. It is incorporated in a movement of the intelligence which is special, beyond usual thought and action. (*SE*, p. 108)

Pound’s interest, like Williams’, lies in the most intense uses of language, and for both poets these examples are as likely to be found in prose as they are in poetry. By incorporating these highly charged moments of prose into “a movement of the intelligence which is special,” Pound is able to transfigure the language of the prose within a “master meter that wishes to come of the classic but at the same time to be bent to and to incorporate the rhythm of modern speech” (*SE*, p. 108).

For Williams, however, it is the movement from the measure of prose to the measure of poetry that reveals both a condition of the world in which that measure is found and a necessary, violent, cyclical action within the world of human thought. By using the prose-like lines of Vazakas to transform the language of Longwell’s story, Williams finds a middle ground between the frozen sections of historical prose and intense moments of his three-stress lines. They become a moment of calm in the swing from “the exposition of fact” to “the crystallization of the imagination.”

This “crescence and ebb” which delineates “the study of all human

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activity" becomes clear as we slip back into the frozen violence of the murders of John S. Van Winkle and his wife, whose murderer, John Johnson, shows an even further separation of fact from feeling as he has no reaction to the killings other than "an expression of pity, he denying any knowledge of participation in the inhuman butchery" (*P*, p. 199). From this horror we are immediately propelled into the even more disturbing rhythms of Williams' variable foot. Here "hacked corpses," "a sea of blood / —the sea that sucks in all rivers," Iwo Jima, the escalating war in Korea—"(October 10, 1950)," all combine ironically in a life-affirming shout that the sea—"our nostalgic / mother in whom the dead, enwombed again / cry out to us to return"—"the blood dark sea . . . is NOT / our home" (*P*, p. 202). And so we flow back into the prose/verse lines in which Paterson "rises up from the sea where the river appears to have lost its identity and accompanied by his faithful bitch, obviously a Chesapeake Bay retriever, turns inland toward Camden where Walt Whitman, much traduced, lived the latter years of his life and died" (*P*, p. iv). With this turning inland, we end this section with the suggestion that the cycle will continue, even though John Johnson is hung "in full view of thousands who had gathered on Garrett Mountain and adjacent house tops to witness the spectacle" (*P*, p. 203), and we are told that:

This is the blast  
the eternal close  
the spiral  
the final somersault  
the end.

In *I Wanted to Write a Poem*, Williams tells us that "*Paterson IV* ends with the protagonist breaking through the bushes, identifying himself with the land, with America. He finally will die but it can't be categorically stated that death ends *anything*" (*IWWP*, p. 22).

As an integral part of the poem, the prose documents necessarily continue and amplify nearly all of the major themes of *Paterson*. The economic themes, for example, are continued not only in the Hamilton/SUM passages, but also in more subtle ways—in the mention that Fred Goodell was a "\$40-a-week factory worker" and in suggesting that Johnson's real object was "doubtless money." A close analysis of the entire poem, however, is beyond the scope of this essay. What is more important is to recognize the prose documents as both "facts" and "things," so that the entire poem becomes a movement from prose "with the poetry hidden in it" to poetry which fuses with prose. In the middle of this cyclical movement are moments of the lyrical, ordinary beauty of

"beautiful thing"—the "radiant gist," the "luminous" material of poetry, obtained by breaking down the blocks of uranium, the blocks of prose, and the blocks of silence.

All of the figures in the poem can be seen as types of the poets who attempt to do just this—release the radiant gist of poetry that will enable them to free the language, and here again we can see the differences between Williams' and Pound's use of prose in their epics. Pound once praised Joyce by saying that, "Good writing, good presentation can be specifically local, but it must not depend on locality. Mr. Joyce does not present 'types' but individuals. I mean he deals with common emotions which run through all races. He does not bank on 'Irish character.'"<sup>25</sup> While both poets obviously attempt to deal with "common emotions which run through all races," Pound, in the *Cantos*, is more concerned with the specific voices of historical individuals. In "Canto XXXI," for example, the particular voices of Jefferson and Adams, placed within Pound's "master meter," blend with Sigismundo's motto—"Tempus loquendi / Tempus tacendi"—to give us a series of historical figures who march contemporaneously through Pound's work. Williams, however, is intensely local, and in presenting his quasi-anonymous voices, some frozen silently in the historical prose while others are freed to speak in the prose letters, Williams gives us a series of poetic types who do not "depend on locality." In his use of the letters in *Paterson*, Williams gives us the voices of these poets in a range of characterization that reflects this movement from the cold facts of prose to the "emotional dynamization" of poetry and echoes Williams' ideas about the nature of the poetic process.

In an essay entitled "How to Write" (1936), Williams describes the process of writing a poem in terms of "two great phases of writing without either of which the work accomplished can hardly be called mastery." He explains that the poet must "proceed backward through the night of our unconscious past" into the "ritualistic, amoral past of the race," using what he calls the "demonic power of the mind"—its "racial and individual past . . . the rhythmic ebb and flow of mysterious life process." Tapping this dark source within the poet enables him to release the "unacknowledged rhythmic symbolism" which is poetry's greatest strength and which "makes all prose in comparison with it little more than the patter of intelligence." This process also puts the poet in touch with "voices" which are "the past, the very depths of our being." Once the writing is on paper, however, it enters that other "great phase" and becomes "an object for the liveliest attention that the full mind can give it. . . . It has entered now a new field, that of intelligence."<sup>26</sup>

The parallels between Williams' "two great phases of writing" and his "two phases of language" are readily apparent. The "night of our unconscious past" becomes the "night mind" of place and "the rhythmic ebb and flow of the mysterious life process" is the "crescence and ebb" that is the force of human activity. The "patter of intelligence" that here is prose is the prose of the first phase of language, and just as it was necessary for Williams to find the poetry that was buried in the prose of the historical documents, so the poet must unite "the intelligence" with the "demonic power of the mind." The poet-figures in the prose letters, in general, represent a spectrum of poets who range from the extreme "intelligence" and coldness of "E. D." to the equally extreme "madness" of Cress, and because Dr. P. Paterson and E. D. remain separate from the voices of Cress and of Garrett Mountain—from the voices which "are the past, the depths of our very being"—these poets in the poem are unsuccessful at finding the "new language" and "unlocking the beauty." But, because he is able to hear all of the voices of *Paterson* and unite both the two phases of writing and the two phases of language, the poet of the poem, Williams, succeeds.

Within *Paterson*, however, Williams still gives us two figures of at least potentially successful poets. Madame Curie is a figure of the successful fusion of female/mother in the usually male role of scientist. She mixes the prose of the intellect with the poetry of invention and is able to release the "luminous," "radiant gist" from the block of uranium. Another such figure contained in the letters is "A. G." By this, I do not necessarily mean that Allen Ginsberg is a successful poet in Williams' terms, but that the figure of Ginsberg is the figure of a potentially successful poet in Williams' poem. Ginsberg is himself a kind of "found object" who just shows up in Williams' life, and he, too, is rooted to the place of Paterson.

As Mariani and others have shown, Ginsberg appears as the true "son of Paterson."<sup>27</sup> A. G. combines both insight and intelligence; he avoided talking with the "Doctor" earlier because he "had nothing to talk about except images of cloudy light, and was not able to speak to [the Doctor] in his own or [A. G.'s] own concrete terms" (*P*, p. 174). One of his poems "connects observations of *things* with an old dream of the void" (*P*, p. 175), and he shares the poet's vision of "some kind of new speech . . . in that it has to be clear statement of fact about misery (and not misery itself), and splendor if there is any out of the subjective wanderings through Paterson," his "natural habitat by memory" (*P*, p. 174). A. G. sees the same "beautiful thing" that Williams does, and with his "Whitmanic mania & nostalgia for cities and detail & panorama" (*P*,

p. 213), he has clearly gotten the "gist" of what Williams has tried to do. Finally, Ginsberg shares this father/son connection with Williams, as he speaks compassionately to the old poet in Book V.

It is significant, however, that we never do see any of A. G.'s poetry, and that only Williams remains as the successful creator of poetry. In *Paterson*, Williams gives us both "fact" and "thing," "prose" and "poetry," "art" and "intelligence," and shows us the complicated rhythms by which they make up our lives. From the detached, cold measure of the historical documents, to the "authoritative voice" of the prose/poetry fusion of Vazakas and Longwell, to the lyrical explosion of "the descent beckons," the cycle of the Falls blends with the cycle of the language, spilling over with a violence to create a new measure, only to be swallowed up again in silence. To add to Williams' own statement about *Paterson*:

The Falls let out a roar as it crashed upon the rocks at its base. In the imagination this roar is a speech or a voice, a speech in particular; it is the poem itself that is the answer. (P, p. iv)  
Indeed, it is the poem that is "the thing itself."

### Appendix

Williams' attraction to Longwell's work should be obvious just from its title—*A Little Story of Old Paterson As Told By An Old Man*. In it, Longwell creates a pastoral sketch of Paterson in the early nineteenth century largely through a series of reminiscences made by "an old friend"—identified at the end of the book as Longwell's grandfather. Like both Barber and Howe, and Nelson, Longwell intersperses bits of poetry with his prose and includes drawings of the old town, here made by the author.

Longwell's phrasing, used also in the Sam Patch story in *Paterson*, has a quiet, ruminative, personal sense to it. Consequently, Williams' major use of it is not in the detached, cold sections of prose, but in verse which is often mistaken for Williams' own recollections and which further complicates the interplay between prose and poetry, language and idea. Also in recapturing the voice of this Old Man, Williams adds to the figures of other old men alluded to in this section. In particular, the figure of Walt Whitman, rising from the sea with his dog, merges with the figures of Charles P. Longwell, Longwell's grandfather (the "Old Man" who actually tells the "Little Story"), Williams himself (an old man of 68), his own enigmatic father, and possibly even Williams'

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CHAPTER III.  
THE OLD GODWIN HOUSE

In the early days of Paterson, the breathing spot of the village was the triangle square bounded by Park street (now lower Main street) and Bank street. Not including the Falls, it was the prettiest spot in town, well\* shaded with\* trees, with a common in the center where the country circus pitched its tents in the old days. On the Park street side it ran down to the river. On the Bank street side it ran to a roadway leading to the barnyard of the Godwin\* House, the barnyard taking up part of the north side of the park. When I was a little shaver the\* circus was an antiquated affair. It was no such head splitting affair as the boy of today sees. It was only a small tent, one ring show.

Menageries and shows travelled separately in those days, and they\* did not allow circuses to perform in the afternoon,\* because that would close up the cotton mills. Time in those days was too precious\* to allow a circus to interfere with work. They only\* performed in the evening, but\* were sure to parade their horses about the time\* the mills stopped work, and the upshot of the matter was—well, the town turned out to the circus in the evening. The circuses in those days were lighted\* by candles especially made for the show. They were giants and as large as the shell of a 12-inch gun. They were fastened in\* boards hung on wires about the tent—\* a peculiar contrivance. The giant candles were placed on the bottom boards, and two rows of smaller candles one above the other tapering to a point, forming a very pretty scene and giving plenty of light. The performance,\* presenting a weird but dazzling spectacle in contrast with the showy performers.\*

From Paterson, p. 197

In the early days of Paterson, the breathing spot of the village was the triangle square bounded by Park Street (now lower Main St.) and Bank Street. Not including the Falls it was the prettiest spot in town. Well shaded by trees with a common in the center where the country circus pitched its tents.

On the Park Street side it ran down to the river. On the Bank Street side it ran to a roadway leading to the barn yard of the Godwin House, the barnyard taking up part of the north side of the park.

The circus was an antiquated affair, only a small tent, one ring show. They didn't allow circuses to perform in the afternoon because that would close up the mills. Time in those days was precious. Only in the evenings. But they were sure to parade their horses about the town about the time the mills stopped work. The upshot of the matter was, the town turned out to the circus in the evening. It was lighted

in those days by candles especially made for the show. They were giants fastened to boards hung on wires about the tent, a peculiar contrivance. The giant candles were placed on the bottom boards, and two rows of smaller candles one above the other tapering to a point, forming a very pretty scene and giving plenty of light.

The candles lasted during the performance presenting a weird but dazzling spectacle in contrast with the showy performers.\*

paternal grandfather—a mysterious figure linked to Percy Bysshe Shelley's circle of intimates.<sup>28</sup>

The section reproduced here shows how Williams has taken Longwell's text and freed the frozen objects within it by giving the prose a new measure, one which he learned from Vazakas, placing them nearly verbatim in the stanzas on page 197. Like the Sarah Cumming story, however, slight omissions and adjustments have been made for metrical shaping, and these revisions are indicated by asterisks and can be found in the verses reproduced.

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<sup>1</sup> Ezra Pound, "How to Read," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. with an introd. by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Pound, "The Prose Tradition in Verse," in *Literary Essays*, p. 372.

<sup>3</sup> Pound, "How to Read," p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 50. All subsequent references to Williams' works will be noted in the text as follows: *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1951)—A; *The Embodiment of Knowledge* (New York: New Directions, 1974)—EK; *Imaginations* (New York: New Directions, 1970)—I; *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet*, reported and edited by Edith Heal (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958)—IWWP; *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1958)—P; *Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1954)—SE; *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957)—SL.

<sup>5</sup> Byron Vazakas, *Transfigured Night*, introd. William Carlos Williams (New York: Macmillan, 1946), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xi.

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Mariani, *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 492.

<sup>8</sup> Vazakas, *Transfigured Night*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>9</sup> See Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 461-518, and Williams, *Selected Letters*, pp. 219-33.

<sup>10</sup> Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, p. 487.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495. It is also interesting to speculate just how much Williams was influenced by the forms of Barber's *Historical Collections*, which contains different typefaces, and both Longwell's and Nelson's works, which would often contain lines of poetry quoted in unlikely places. See John W. Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of New Jersey: Past and Present* (New Haven, Conn.: n.p., 1868); Charles P. Longwell, *A Little Story of Old Paterson As Told By An Old Man* (Paterson, N.J.: n.p., 1901); William Nelson, *History of the City of Paterson and the County of Passaic, New Jersey* (Paterson, N.J.: n.p., 1901); William Nelson and Charles A. Shriner, *History of Paterson and Its Environs: The Silk City*, 3 vols. (New York and Chicago: n.p., 1920).

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Nash, "The Use of Prose in 'Paterson,'" *Perspective*, 6 (1953), 191-99. In general, most critics support Nash's explanation of the purposes of the prose passages.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

<sup>14</sup> "Reply to a Young Scientist," quoted in Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry* (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), p. 104.

<sup>15</sup> The story of Sarah Cumming originally appeared in Alden's Collections, but Williams' source was probably an "annexed account" quoted in Barber and Howe, *Historical Collections of New Jersey: Past and Present*, p. 412. The ellipses following "in the district of Maine . . ." (*P*, p. 14) do indicate an omission from the original—one which fixes the character of Mrs. Cumming—"She was a lady of amiable disposition, a well-cultivated mind, distinguished intelligence, and most exemplary piety; and she was much endeared to a large circle of respectable friends and connections." The ellipses after "caught him once more. . ." (*P*, p. 15) also indicate an omission, here the reason for her fall—"Mrs. Cumming had complained of a dizziness early in the morning; and, as her eyes had been some time fixed upon the uncommon objects before her, when she moved with the view to retrace her steps, it is probable she was seized with the same malady, tottered, and in a moment fell, a distance of 74 feet, into the frightening gulf!" The ellipses after "on the following day. . ." (*P*, p. 14) are simply Williams' addition, and along with the insertion of "(the Hundred Steps)" (*P*, p. 14), these additions do change the flow of the passage from the original rhythms.

<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Sankey, *A Companion to William Carlos Williams's "Paterson"* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 41. Though Sankey feels that this piece is "undoubtedly Williams's own," I suspect it may be a compilation of several sources with some revisions made by Williams.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-43; see also Williams, *Selected Essays*, pp. 134-61.

<sup>18</sup> For a further explanation of the "metamorphic qualities" of *Paterson* see Quinn, *The Metamorphic Tradition in Modern Poetry*; also John C. Thirwall, "William Carlos Williams' 'Paterson': The Search for a Redeeming Language—A Personal Epic in Five Parts," *New Directions 17* (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 258-67.

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<sup>19</sup> Unpublished material in the Williams papers, Lockwood Memorial Library Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo, quoted in Joel Conarroe, *William Carlos Williams' Paterson: Language and Landscape* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 134-38; also "On Measure—Statement for Cid Corman," in Williams, *Selected Essays*, pp. 337-40.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, "Letter to an Australian Editor," *Briarcliff Quarterly*, 3 (1946), 208, quoted in James K. Guimond, "William Carlos Williams and the Past: Some Clarifications," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 1 (1971), 499.

<sup>22</sup> From a conversation with John C. Thirwall, quoted in Thirwall, "William Carlos Williams' 'Paterson,'" pp. 275-82.

<sup>23</sup> Sankey, *A Companion to William Carlos Williams's "Paterson,"* p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> Randall Jarrell, "A View of Three Poets," *Partisan Review*, 18 (1951), reprinted in Charles Tomlinson, *William Carlos Williams: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> Pound, "Dubliners' and Mr. James Joyce," in *Literary Essays*, p. 401.

<sup>26</sup> Reprinted in Linda Welsheimer Wagner, *The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 145-47.

<sup>27</sup> For more about Ginsberg and Williams, see Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 604-05, 702-06.

<sup>28</sup> See Mariani, *William Carlos Williams*, pp. 4-14.

# Allusion, Image, and Associative Pattern: The Answers in Mansfield's "Bliss"

JUDITH S. NEAMAN

"Bliss," Katherine Mansfield's most ambiguous story of initiation, poses many problems, some of which have plagued critics for years.<sup>1</sup> What is Bertha's "bliss"? What does Pearl Fulton represent and to what does her name allude? Why a pear tree instead of an apple? Was Bertha really cold? Is she hysterical? Would *would* "happen now"? Why, at the end of such a crisis of disillusionment, is the pear tree "as lovely as ever"?<sup>2</sup> Yet, Mansfield has answered these questions in the story by interweaving allusions to two sources—the Bible and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*—whose major role in "Bliss" has been largely ignored. These allusions not only answer the crucial questions but they also illuminate the meaning of the tale, while simultaneously charting the anatomy of its creation.

Perhaps because critics have seen all too clearly the obvious tree of knowledge blooming in Bertha's garden,<sup>3</sup> none seems to have detected the first overt clue to the thematic importance of the Bible. It appears as a familiar echo in the words, "for the first time in her life, she desired her husband" (p. 349). In Genesis 3.16,<sup>4</sup> among the punishments God metes out to the disobedient Eve is: "thy desire *shall* be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee." In visiting this affliction on Bertha at the very moment that she first experiences marital lust, Mansfield appears to indicate an easy familiarity with the long tradition of biblical commentary. According to both Augustinian and Talmudic interpretation, lust entered the world as a result of the Fall. "Bliss" pursues the theme by chapter and verse.

In the same chapter of Genesis, directly before and after Eve is first sentenced to a life of connubial desire, there are numerous phrases so similar in image and content to those Mansfield uses in "Bliss" that the story seems to be almost a gloss upon the Bible. The evidence that the words of Genesis were deeply embedded in her mind appears in a diary entry of February 1916 in which she remarks that, since she came to Bandol where she wrote "Bliss" in 1918, she has "read the Bible for hours on end." She wrote here of wanting to know "if Lot followed close on Noah or something like that. But I feel so bitterly that they ought to be part of my breathing."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, during the same brief period of feverish work in which she produced "Bliss," Mansfield wrote the story "Psychology," in which a character playfully remarks, "And God said; 'Let there be cake. And there was cake. And God saw that it was Good.' "

In both stories, words or phrases from Genesis appear in brief but they set up reverberations which guide the reader's responses to all subsequent events. In "Bliss," Mansfield's more indirect use of the words of Genesis is overbalanced by a closer attention to the intent and material of it. In fact, the parallels between the biblical work and Mansfield's story are so close that the words of Genesis may inform the reader not only of what Bertha's life was before the day of her maturation but also of what her future will be. In this way, Genesis answers Bertha's last question: "What is going to happen now?" If, like a modern Eve,<sup>6</sup> Bertha has lived in a fool's paradise which is destroyed by knowledge, then she and Harry are destined to repeat, in a modern form, the fate of their first models. This is so much the case that God himself answers Bertha's question about her future. What "will happen now" is that Bertha will desire only her husband and he will dominate her life. "In sorrow [she] will bring forth children" while Harry, who has tasted another form of the forbidden fruit of knowledge, will now eat "the herb of the field" "in sorrow . . . all the days of [his] life" (Gen. 3.17). Bertha's future children will be begotten in sorrow and bitterness born of the knowledge she has gained. She will know that Harry sees her as Adam saw Eve after the Fall—as the "mother of all living" (Gen. 3.20), which, in Mansfield's punning paraphrase, is Bertha Young.

Because Mansfield's metamorphosis of this chapter of Genesis remains so close to its source, readers will not be surprised to find still further relations between the words and events of "Bliss" and those of Genesis 3. The garden in which this young pair learns the consequences of sin is populated not only by a wondrous tree about which all knowledge revolves but also by animals. Following her own associative thought patterns, Mansfield has linked the denizens of the first garden and the

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Youngs' garden with the behavior of Adam and Eve and also with Darwinian evolutionary theory. The Norman Knights are also compared to first forebears by their name but they are now the forebears of English society. Mansfield compares them to monkeys, for "Face" Knight, so perfectly matched with her mate, "Mug," is wearing a funny little coat with monkeys all over it and looks "like a very intelligent monkey."<sup>7</sup>

Here the reader must wonder if Mansfield is using her Bible to deliver a post-Darwinian stab at English society. The rest of Face's outfit echoes Adam's and Eve's first attempt at clothing, which they made in Genesis 3 to hide their shame at their newly discovered nakedness. As God created for Adam and his helpmeet "coats of skins" (3.21) to help them "hide their shame," so Face wears a yellow silk dress that looks like "scraped banana skins" and she is later described as "crouched before the fire in her banana skins" (p. 343). No sooner has Bertha noticed the simian clothing and physiognomy of her guest than Mr. Norman Knight remarks on parenthood and paradise, "This is a sad, sad fall! . . . When the perambulator comes into the hall—. . . ." The final link of this particular chain which seems to stretch through Mansfield's mind from Bible to "Bliss" is forged when Norman Knight remarks in parting, "You know our shame" (p. 343).

Gradually, it becomes apparent that the innocent Bertha and her hairy mate, an emotional primate if there ever was one, have opened their house and garden to beasts from a number of literary fields. Eddie Warren, his last name removing all doubt of his nature and habitat, is a stuttering rabbit. Terrified by his taxi ride, dressed in white socks and an enchanting white scarf to match, Eddie speaks in conversational tones and patterns that often echo those of Alice in Wonderland's white rabbit.

Pearl has been called a moon to Bertha's sun<sup>8</sup> and a parallel to the pear tree, which has also been identified with Bertha and Harry.<sup>9</sup> However, Mansfield's descriptions of Pearl emphasize not only Pearl's lunar qualities (she is dressed "all in silver with a silver fillet binding her head" and her fingers, "like moonbeams, are so slender that a pale light seemed to come from them") but also focus the reader's attention on her "cool arm," "heavy eyelids," and "[mysterious] half smile."<sup>10</sup> Pearl is such an adept at enigma that everyone who encounters her assigns her another identity. Her conversation merely amplifies the mystery, for it is barely audible; she whispers and intimates. Bertha is not even certain what Pearl murmured about the pear tree or if she had guessed that Pearl said, "just that" (p. 347) when she looked out at the tree in the garden. Yet, it is Pearl who asks if there is a garden, Pearl whose "cool

arm could fan—fan—start blazing—blazing the fire of bliss that Bertha did not know what to do with" (p. 344).

Enigmatic, dressed in scaly silver, full of whispers and murmurs, Pearl is infinitely tempting. Her lidded eyes conceal her passion for Harry. But she is secretive, intimating, cool-skinned and cool-souled, in other words, "the subtlest beast of the field" (Gen. 3.3). Thus, Bertha cannot see the truth until she glimpses the kiss. With that kiss, Bertha's innocence falls and her blissful illusions are destroyed. Only then does Bertha begin to see her mysterious friend in a new light. No longer the distant and enchanting moon of Bertha's hopes, Pearl now appears to her hostess to resemble the seductive gray cat who had provoked a shiver of sexual revulsion in Bertha earlier in the evening. One critic believes that Bertha's new vision of Pearl is evoked by a horror of the bestiality she perceives in her former love, since she considers that Pearl's purity has been sullied by the heterosexual behavior Bertha abhors.<sup>11</sup> But, if we see Pearl as a serpent, the common Talmudic and patristic interpretation of the serpent's role in tempting Eve seems far more appropriate a view.

According to this traditional understanding of the Bible, it was the serpent's seduction of Eve that first induced her to lust for Adam. Pearl's seduction of Bertha awakens Bertha's lust for her own husband. In fact, Bertha's image of Pearl followed by Eddie, as the seductive gray cat followed the black cat, is so distorted a view of Eddie that it makes little sense if Pearl is not seen as the serpent. Mansfield has, after all, painted Eddie as effeminate at least and homosexual at most, hence hardly a likely candidate for seduction by a woman. Clearly the "grey cat, dragging its belly . . . [as it] crept across the lawn, and a black one, its shadow trail[ing] after" (p. 341), reminds Bertha, and is intended to remind readers of "Bliss," of the serpent of Genesis which God punished by decreeing that it should crawl on its belly.

In every possible way, Pearl fulfills the role of the serpent in the garden. She is one of those beautiful women with "something strange about them" (p. 341) with whom Bertha is always falling in love. Like the rest of these temptresses, she is strangely secretive while seeming to be *so open* and Bertha is certain that they "share" something. Until Bertha gains the carnal knowledge which will be revealed to her, she is incapable of understanding that what they share is a lust for Harry. By the time Bertha realizes that the "bliss" with which she has burned is sexual desire and then sees that desire mocked (all within moments), she has tasted the fruit of the tree and found it a bitter dessert to the banquet of sight and taste she has laid for herself and her guests. That the discoveries which

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cause her so much pain should take place at a dinner party celebrated in a house with a flowering fruit tree is no coincidence.

Critics who have noted the importance of the imagery of food and eating in this tale<sup>12</sup> have ignored standard biblical associations among lust, fruit, and knowledge so clearly introduced in Mansfield's references to the food and eating which led to the Fall and lead to this fall. Bertha's first important act in the story is associated with these elements. The reader can see this link in her conflict between the enjoyment of temptation and her fear of succumbing to it. First she luxuriates in the beauty of the fruits she has bought for the party. Then, as she begins to fear the intensity she tries to repress it, crying, "No, no. I'm getting hysterical" (p. 339). As the tale and Bertha's growth simultaneously progress, the images of fruit and eating become less abstract and aesthetic and more active and hostile, for their connection with sex, flesh, and desire is clarified. Pearl rolls a tangerine between her luminous fingers. Harry loves the "white flesh" of lobster and "pistachio ices—green and cold like the eyelids of Egyptian dancers" (p. 345). The most emotionally evocative dish is made of eggs, reminding us of the embryonic Youngs and their new infant. In the forms of the new cook's omelettes and the "admirable soufflé," eggs become the crucial bonds in the marriage, inspiring Harry's praise which makes Bertha almost weep "with childlike pleasure" (p. 345).

After Bertha sees Harry and Pearl embracing, the nature of the imagery shifts from its focus on the food to be eaten to a new emphasis on the act of eating it. With this shift, the cannibalism which has been vaguely implied now becomes glaring.<sup>13</sup> When Harry kisses Pearl "with his lips curled back in a hideous grin" (p. 349), the reader, like Bertha, sees him devouring this delectable woman whose serenity he had earlier attributed to a "good stomach." Hence, fruit becomes the visible apple of temptation (at one point in the story it is a tangerine turning in Pearl's fingers), and eating becomes the act of lust born of knowledge.

If fruits and flesh and the devouring of these represent desire and consummation as well as knowledge, then instruments and the music not played on them represent human bodies and sexual frustration and/or repression. Marilyn Zorn quotes Mansfield's letter of May 24, 1918, to Ottoline Morrell in which Mansfield cries, "What might be so divine is out of tune—or the instruments are all silent and nobody is going to play again."<sup>14</sup> For her purposes, Mansfield's succeeding words are irrelevant, for ours, they are central. "There is no concert for us. Isn't there? Is it all over? Is our desire and longing and eagerness, quite all that's left? Shall we sit here forever in this immense wretched hall—

waiting for the lights to go up—which will never go up.”<sup>15</sup> That is precisely what Bertha does at the end, of course, and it is Harry who “shut[s] up shop” or turns out the lights (p. 350). The musical refrains, though they occur only three times in the story, are central and the association between the fruits, the passion, and the music becomes increasingly specific. Music is “the food of love.” Like the eating of the fruit, the playing of music, in this tale at least, is forbidden.

At the very outset of the tale, Bertha longs to dance, bowl a hoop, or “simply laugh at nothing” (p. 337) in the streets to express her bliss. “Oh, is there no way you can express it without being ‘drunk and disorderly’? How idiotic civilization is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare rare fiddle?” (p. 337). Bertha’s protest against the social requirement that she quash her ebullience becomes a louder aria when Nanny removes the baby from her embrace: “How absurd it was. Why have a baby if it has to be kept—not in a case like a rare string fiddle—but in another woman’s arms?” (p. 339).

Finally, the fiddle—shaped like a pear and analogue, like the pear, to a woman’s body—grows into a piano. Now fully aware and unsuccessfully trying to repress her thoughts and fears about that moment at which she will share the bed with a husband she suddenly desires, Bertha runs to the piano. “What a pity someone does not play! What a pity someone does not play!” (p. 348). Indeed, Bertha’s body has not been played, nor has she played. But now the fruit of carnal knowledge is about to be transmuted into the music of desire and the passion arising from both is about to suffer “a dying fall,”<sup>16</sup> a hidden pun on both the original fall from grace and the musical form of a “dying fall.”

Associating the tree of knowledge with the food of love, Mansfield has subtly alluded to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, a play she knew almost by heart, which celebrates the Feast of Twelfth Night or Epiphany. This reference creates a musical tie which binds all the images and references of “Bliss.” Like the primary biblical allusion, this secondary Shakespearean allusion from the opening lines of the play not only recapitulates the theme of the Fall but, in so doing, explains in part why Bertha’s beloved tree is a pear tree. The lines alone explain the musical references in “Bliss” and show the relations between love, food, and the shattering of Bertha’s innocence:

If music be the food of love, play on;  
Give me excess of it that surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken and so die. —

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That strain again!—it had a dying fall!

(*Twelfth Night* I.1.4)

To observe Mansfield's whole train of thought, the reader must consider the entire play. *Twelfth Night* is a play of pairing and couples, of confused and confusing sexuality, of female love which leads to male-female unions. The pear tree of "Bliss" may be Mansfield's conscious or unconscious pun on pair, as Magalaner suggests, for the story is itself full of pairs and even possibly alter egos.<sup>17</sup> More important, Mansfield was interested throughout her life in "shadow selves," as she called them in a letter to Murry of 1920.<sup>18</sup> But the connections among the pairing and the pear tree and the structure and imagery of *Twelfth Night* run deeper still.

Large portions of the play take place in a garden which belongs to Olivia; there, to oblige Orsino, Viola courts Olivia. Viola is dressed as a man and Olivia does, indeed, conceive a passion for her, only to discover that she is not eligible. It is only after meeting Viola's twin, Sebastian, whom Viola had feared was dead, that Olivia transfers her affection to him and gives him a pearl as a love token. Viola, one cannot help noting, is closely related to the viol or fiddle to which Bertha compares her caged body, and Bertha is, at first, Pearl's wooer, sadly winning her for Harry. Thus, the theme of sexual confusion, of pairing of opposites, of "shadow selves" which Mansfield had cherished so long and embodied in her story "Sun and Moon," is everywhere in "Bliss." Bertha and Harry, Bertha and Pearl (Bertha's gift to Harry), the black and gray cats, Pearl and Eddie, and the spiritual twins, Mug and Face, recapitulate this favorite theme, one which Magalaner has noted.<sup>19</sup> In *Twelfth Night*, as in "Bliss," heterosexual love is the goal toward which the play strives and pairing is, after all, just another name for copulation, suggesting the lust which the fruit of the tree evoked.

But Mansfield's personal and aesthetic interests might have been far more effective than her reading in directing her choice of associations which formed "Bliss." Since girlhood, Mansfield had been both a cellist and a passionate lover of gardens and pear trees. Magalaner notes that, a year before she wrote "Bliss," Mansfield mentioned, in a letter to Ottoline Morrell, the importance of writing about a flower garden with people in it:

walking in the garden—several pairs of people—their conversation—their slow pacing—their glances as they pass one another.

.....

A kind of, musically speaking, conversation set to flowers.<sup>20</sup>

In Murry's volume the letter immediately succeeding the letter to Otoline Morrell was a note to Virginia Woolf about the sketch "Kew Gardens":

Yes, your Flower Bed is very good. There's a still, quivering changing light over it all and a sense of those couples dissolving in the bright air which fascinates me—<sup>21</sup>

Of all the plants and trees in a garden, a pear tree was one of the most important to Mansfield and, at the time of the writing of "Bliss," she must have been thinking of it. Convinced that she was dying after the major hemorrhage which preceded the writing of this story by a few days, she thought constantly of her beloved brother, Chummie, who had recently been killed in the war. How often the two of them had sat on the bench beneath the pear tree in Tinakori Road in New Zealand and exchanged confidences. The new home which she and Murry first rented in England had a garden with a pear tree.

If these two types of sources, the biographical and the literary, consistently clarify Mansfield's use of images and symbols in the story, it would be illogical to ignore their potential influence upon the meaning of the story. Might they not also, central as they seem to be to Mansfield's consciousness at the time she wrote "Bliss," shed light on the relationship between Bertha and Pearl, for example? Upon this love, some critics of the story have dwelled far too emphatically. Mansfield's friend Virginia Woolf, for example, hated "Bliss," which she considered a shallow, maudlin tale of lesbianism. Later critics, like Nebeker,<sup>22</sup> have argued that Bertha's real goal is Pearl and that the sorrow she experiences is a result of Pearl's rejection of her for Harry. But nothing in the story suggests this. In fact, Bertha considers a bedtime discussion with Harry about what she and Pearl share. She imagines that this conversation will promote the spiritual understanding that will culminate in their first passionate physical union. In both *Twelfth Night* and "Bliss," youthful and innocent love is homosexual, as if both authors were chronicling the normal English schoolgirl stage of maturation. Heterosexual love is the source of the excitement, the growth, the real passion. Bertha's "crushes" on women are nothing new in her life, but her desire for her husband is both new and startling to her. Ultimately, Bertha's disillusionment over the impossibility of fulfilling her terrifying but exciting new desire matures her, for, through this loss of hope, she learns the sorrow of knowledge. Finally, it is Harry's "cool" voice which sets the seal on Bertha's fear and suffering.

Critics have cited Bertha's frigidity as the most incontrovertible proof of her lesbianism. After all, Bertha seems to have admitted to

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frigidity when she reflected that "it had worried her dreadfully at first to find that she was so cold" (p. 348). Despite the fact that readers conventionally accept a narrator's statements about him or herself, Bertha's self-evaluation, in this instance, cannot be taken at face value, no matter how afraid she is of her first real sexual encounter. Too much of her behavior argues against frigidity.<sup>23</sup> She experiences bliss, she resents the restrictions of a society that demands she "cage" her body, she enjoys her child's flesh and resents the woman who withdraws it from her, she aches to communicate her bliss to Harry though it is hopeless to do so. Bertha is highly sensual, glorying in the colors of fruit, in smells and sights, in feelings she can hardly contain. Surely these are not the responses of a frigid woman. The source of her conviction that she is frigid lies elsewhere—at the site of her "discovery" that she is so cold. It is the same source from which she learns that her desire to dance and sing, to hold her child are symptoms of "hysteria" (pp. 337, 338). That source is the society she identifies as the one which will call her "drunk and disorderly" (p. 338) if she gives vent to her passions; it is the "idiotic civilization" which demands that she imprison her feelings and her body. Harry and she have "discussed" her problem and he has explained that he is "different" (p. 348).

That Bertha's testimony about her own proclivities is not necessarily reliable is attested to by the sardonic tone, the desperate contradiction of her "Really, really—she had everything. . . ." <sup>24</sup> She is missing something—something that throws a pall over her marriage, and surely part of what she is missing is the understanding husband who would not hasten her off the phone, truncate her expression of feeling. Is the rest the passion she lacks or is it, as Mansfield's portrayal of Harry's callousness suggests, the passion he tells her she lacks? Throughout the story, Bertha acts the good wife and mother, observing the conventions of social respectability which pinion her whims and moods. The purveyors of these conventions appear in the forms of Nanny and Harry, yet she still emerges as a passionate woman. When she finally experiences the marital lust so "improper" in a good English matron, Bertha learns that the fruit of desire is death, for there is always a snake in the garden and the music of passion always suffers a "dying fall."

In marrying these sources to produce so carefully unified a story, Mansfield has disclosed the cast of her mind. Critics who have often pointed out how autobiographical the tale is, have neglected one major aspect of Mansfield's autobiography to which both her letters as well as her journals draw attention. Mansfield was devoted to Shakespeare and

the Bible and was especially absorbed in Genesis at the time she wrote "Bliss." She spoke of her desire to know the Bible as well as she knew Shakespeare, whose words she recited constantly. In a letter to Murry, dated March 4, 1918, written only a week after completing "Bliss,"<sup>25</sup> Mansfield remarked to Murry: "My Shakespeare is full of notes for my children to light on." Magalaner noted a letter to Murry written just days before the completion of "Bliss" in which Mansfield speaks of her love for Murry in terms of food and eating.<sup>26</sup> She concludes, "'Hang there like fruit, my soul, till the tree die! The tree *would* die.'<sup>27</sup>

*Twelfth Night* is much on her mind. She notes often at this time that she is thinking of death (because of her own severe hemorrhage and Chummie's death), and these morbid thoughts intermingle with visions of gardens and food. She is filled with what she calls either "a rage of bliss" or bliss she longs to "share unexplained." Coincidentally perhaps, both the story and the title of "Sun and Moon" are conceived at this same time. The intellectual and emotional recipe for "Bliss" is revealed in these threads of thought recorded in Mansfield's journals and letters. How she regarded the conclusion of the story is not. Yet, the mystery of the concluding lines is solved by finishing the speech from *Twelfth Night* which both opens the play and sets the musical key of the story.

The work ends on an elegiac note: innocence dies quickly, but those who see their paradise fade survive. They live out long lives in a twilight sorrow, illuminated only by a memory of an irretrievable bliss.

O, spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou!  
 That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
 Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there,  
 Of what validity or pitch soe'er,  
 But falls into abatement and low price  
 Even in a minute!

(*Twelfth Night* I.1.9–15)

*Twelfth Night* tells us what has happened; Genesis tells us that what happened once will happen—again and again. The pear tree remains "as lovely as ever and as still" because, like the tree of knowledge, it remains firmly rooted in perfect Eden. Only Bertha is expelled. The lasting beauty and seductiveness of the tree sound an ironic note of contrast with the imperfection of the love they provoke and disclose. In the mythic world in which the pear tree, now forever out of Bertha's reach, blooms eternally without blemish, Eddie Warren's last words about the eternal quality of the lines: "Why must it always be tomato soup?" bear the wisdom of the Shakespearean clowns; they are set against an archetypal quest for knowledge which will always end in the

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"too dreadfully eternal" (p. 350) discovery that sweet fruit turns bitter when bliss fades. Accompanied by the unplayed music of *Twelfth Night* Bertha Young relives the epiphany of Genesis in a London garden.

<sup>1</sup> Saralyn R. Daly (*Katherine Mansfield* [New York, Twayne, 1965], pp. 81–83) refers to Bertha's "bliss" as the passion she and Pearl share for Harry, and agrees with Sylvia Berkman (*Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1951]) that Bertha is hysterical. Daly believes that what Bertha first "interprets . . . as 'bliss,'" but shortly calls "hysteria," has arisen because she knows her husband is having an affair . . ." (p. 83). She believes that Bertha is uncomfortable "before animal sexuality" (p. 83) and that Bertha "physically rejects Harry" (p. 86) as the cool pear-tree analogue, Pearl, does not. The pear tree remains lovely, according to Berkman, because it reveals the "immutability of natural beauty in the face of human disaster" (p. 107), whereas Daly (p. 87) points out that "such beauty offers no promise. . . ." She asserts that Bertha knows what will inevitably happen. Pointing out how Mansfield uses autobiography to reconcile parts of the self in her writing, Marvin Magalaner ("Traces of Her 'Self' in Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 24 [1978], 420) sees the characters as parts of the whole, so that the lead character is the moon, Pearl, and the tree is Bertha-Pearl. The woman becomes a compound of opposites, the "virginal matron and harlot" amalgamated in "Bertha-Pearl" (p. 420). In his longer study, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971), p. 85, Magalaner again equates Pearl with the moon and Harry with the tree, maintaining that Bertha wants to stave off old age, hence she sees the pear tree as always in full bloom though it is "blasted in advance by Marvell's chill observations on time and eternity." Helen F. Nebeker ("The Pear Tree: Sexual Implications in Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss,'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, 24 [1978], 545–51) sees "Bliss" as a tale of Bertha's homosexual love for Pearl and her disillusionment at the discovery of Pearl's passion for a man. Only what Nebeker calls the "bisexual pear tree" remains perfect. Marilyn Zorn ("Visionary Flowers: Another Study of Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* [Spring 1980], 173) calls the story a romantic "cry against corruption" of Shelley's "white radiance of eternity" and speaks of her inability to find someone with whom to share her vision which will remain locked in her forever unrealized passion (p. 147).

<sup>2</sup> "Bliss," *The Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. J. Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1937), p. 350. All further quotations of the story are from this edition and will hereafter be cited in the text by page number.

<sup>3</sup> Magalaner casually refers to Bertha as "a more mature Eve than Laura" and to Harry as a "modern Adam" whose fall causes Bertha's "expulsion from the fantasy garden" in *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 77. Berkman, *Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study*, p. 252, notes that a "ruined Eden" is one of Mansfield's major symbols in numerous stories, especially "Bliss." Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," p. 146, also utilizes the Eden imagery noted by Magalaner. She speaks of the sun images in this story and of Mansfield's consistent use of images "which link the sun and moon" as "holistic" for Mansfield. "They suggest the earthly paradise, the condition of prelapsarian innocence."

<sup>4</sup> All biblical citations are from the King James Version.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. John Middleton Murry (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 56. In this same entry, Mansfield writes that her Bible reading has continued "with the same desire" as that with which she has always read Shakespeare.

<sup>6</sup> For Edenic imagery and references to innocence, see note 3, especially Zorn, who also mentions the prevalence of these images in the story "Sun and Moon," and Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*.

<sup>7</sup> Face's coat is described on page 343 of "Bliss." Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, pp. 82–84, writes of Mansfield's association of the couple with monkeys who mimic and imitate and are part of the gross animalistic aspect typical of the segment of society Mansfield scorns.

<sup>8</sup> Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 78; Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> Berkman, *Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study*, p. 195; Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" p. 195.

<sup>10</sup> "Bliss" (p. 345) actually refers to Pearl's expression as a "strange half smile."

<sup>11</sup> Nebeker, "The Pear Tree," p. 546.

<sup>12</sup> This imagery is especially noted by Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 82, and "Traces of Her 'Self,'" pp. 415–17, and by Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," pp. 146–47.

<sup>13</sup> Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," p. 147; Magalaner, "Traces of her 'Self,'" p. 417, speaks of Mansfield's preoccupation with "consuming and being consumed."

<sup>14</sup> Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," p. 144, is quoting from *Katherine Mansfield's Letters to John Middleton Murry: 1913–1922*, ed. John Middleton Murry (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 211, hereafter cited as *Letters*.

<sup>15</sup> *Letters*, pp. 144–45.

<sup>16</sup> This phrase appears in *Twelfth Night* in the first speech about music as "the food of love," I.1.4, as quoted below in the text.

<sup>17</sup> Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" pp. 419, 422.

<sup>18</sup> Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" pp. 418, 419, quotes this letter (from *Letters*, p. 566) and cites both other letters and journal entries dealing with the same theme. He elaborates on people as parts of one another or "pairs," p. 421.

<sup>19</sup> Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" pp. 420, 421, and *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" p. 421.

<sup>21</sup> *The Letters of Katherine Mansfield* (New York: Knopf, 1936), pp. 70–72.

<sup>22</sup> Nebeker, "The Pear Tree," pp. 547, 548.

<sup>23</sup> Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 75, accepts Bertha's testimony that she is "getting hysterical" and that she is "cold." Yet, Bertha's perception of her own marital bliss is clearly one even she doubts. Why, then, should one accept what is clearly something she was told by either society or Harry (that she is hysterical in joy and cold in bed) as accurate? In fact, the extramarital joys Harry pursues may be justified, as Mansfield suggests in the story, by his belief that he is different. If Harry sees Bertha's behavior as license to pursue other women, he is fully justified and can be "cool," even claiming

about Bertha "The woman gave me of the tree and I did eat." This fractured version of Genesis 3 is part of what the story is about.

<sup>24</sup> See Magalaner, *The Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, p. 76, and Zorn, "Visionary Flowers," p. 145, on the irony or delusion apparent in this line from page 342 of "Bliss."

<sup>25</sup> *Letters*, p. 127.

<sup>26</sup> Magalaner, "Traces of Her 'Self,'" p. 416.

<sup>27</sup> Mansfield is quoting and elaborating on the line, "Hang there like a fruit, my soul, Till the tree die," from *Cymbeline* V. 5.236. Another work about confused identities, this Shakespearean play includes the character of Imogen who has just asked her husband why he rejected her. These admiring words are his reply.

# Introduction

EDWARD BUTSCHER

It is interesting, and perhaps instructive, that many of the critics asked to contribute essays on Paul Bowles's work for this special issue of *Twentieth Century Literature* responded in a similar fashion. It soon became evident that psychoanalytic perspectives would dominate. Several reasons for this spring immediately to mind, among them, the realization that academia has, in general, been more receptive to psychological critiques over the last decade or so, to the point where they are almost as fashionable as semiotic or deconstructionist readings (and misreadings). And there is no discounting the allure of a diagnostic system rich in metaphoric dualities and appealingly at odds with the ultimately counterproductive separation of artifice from artifex mandated by a "new criticism" vantage.

Of greater import, however, is the nature of the imagination under scrutiny, an imagination schooled in Poe's adolescent version of English Romanticism and quite in tune with the pathological extremes scored by Conrad Aiken, Sylvia Plath, and a host of lesser imitators. From the beginning, Bowles has left little doubt as to his obsession with the sort of shocking, often masochistic and/or sadistic events a prepubic mind delights in reifying, frightening itself and its audience in the delicious process. Consequently, some kind of psychoanalytic reckoning appears necessary, even inescapable. Unlike my coeditor, who should know better, I am neither unconvinced nor disappointed by our critics' frequent use of insights gained from depth psychology to aid their attempts at limning Bowles's significant literary career.

To be sure, reductionism remains a danger, and always will where theory seeks to occupy creative ground, but none of the essays in the second half of this gathering are ever less than judicious in their efforts to integrate psychoanalytic wisdom with more traditional methods.

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When Marilyn Moss, for instance, subjects Bowles's concept of autobiography to the laser beam of his own experiences with deceit in order to illuminate the art behind *Without Stopping*, or when Steven Olson surveys Bowles's family romance tragedy to explicate his fictional aesthetic, they are enriching rather than limiting our comprehension of the writer's achievements. Similarly, Mitzi Berger Hamovitch's acute analysis of the existential dilemma at the core of *Let It Come Down* increases understanding of the identity crisis—private and universal—generating Bowles's narrative without blunting its emotive complexity; my own critique of the poetry strives to retain a diachronic context and evaluative basis. The other essays are somewhat more orthodox in approach, though no less original in their conclusions.

Regardless of tactical differences of opinion, which seems a healthy sign in such a miscellaneous enterprise, what should be clear is a shared editorial conviction that Paul Bowles is a talented American writer who deserves closer attention than he has garnered to date. The difficulty of the task, of snaring and measuring the literary products of a man who has deliberately isolated himself from the culture of his birth and nurture, has not been underestimated. There must be, and are, many Paul Bowleses, his presence and impact too diverse for a single portrait. The letters, memoirs, stories, and commentaries in the initial half of our collection underscore this human truth as they labor to pin down a personal self's public aspects.

The gentle, polite, ever sly Bowles recently interviewed by Oleg Kerensky is just as genuine as the playful, occasionally impatient Bowles limned by the letters to Irving Malin, or the benign, if demanding, Bowles that John Bernard Myers encountered in the 1940s. This is the same Bowles described by Richard Goldstone as receiving a steady stream of visitors from overseas "with uniform courtliness and the offer of a cup of tea," still a mystery figure, but one who can elicit affection and respect from such contemporaries as James Purdy.

In the end, of course, the hope behind this special issue is to explore art and artist from every possible angle, confident that each new exposure will frame another Paul Bowles worth pursuing further.

# An Anti-introduction

IRVING MALIN

Paul Bowles is an authentic, wide-ranging genius. He writes poetry and prose; he composes music in many forms; he translates Spanish, French, Arabic fiction; he writes (less frequently) music criticism. Now in his seventy-seventh year—he was born in December 1910—his creative activities show no sign of flagging. Though slow in coming, critical recognition of his diverse achievements is beginning to dawn, signaled specifically by the 1985 publications of Jeffrey Miller's descriptive bibliography and Wayne Pounds's study.

Bowles belongs in the American tradition of Poe, Faulkner, and other gothic writers. He often writes about the impulsive, hallucinatory, and frightening events which deeply alarm us because they suggest that the "underground man" rises to the surface more than we rational readers want to admit.

It is tempting, of course, to apply psychoanalytical criticism to his literature, to reduce (and thus defuse) the potent literature to a series of logical constructs, clear explanations. Many of the contributors to this issue do so. I think that their interpretations are often original and helpful but ultimately limited by an "unconscious" desire to reassure and calm both themselves and their readers.

Bowles, however, like Poe and Kafka, is in the end "beyond psychology." Although he has read Freud, he apparently rejects such tidy concepts as castration anxiety, Oedipus complex, primary narcissism, Thanatos. He refuses to *limit* human behavior to simple mechanisms and characterizations. He does more, goes further: he deliberately *plays* with psychological exploration. When we read, for example, "Pages from Cold Point," we are surprised by the sudden reversals of roles, the parody of Western science. Again, Poe and Kafka come immediately to mind—two extremists who can never be trapped

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inside categorical boxes. We understand that Bowles also eludes complete analysis.

Bowles is important for other reasons. He is related to writers such as Burroughs and Ginsberg. He is "hip"—to use an old-fashioned term—because he is fascinated by the deviant, revels in the exotic, courts drug-induced states of consciousness. He stands, if you will, in a crucial position, takes us back to Brockden Brown, Poe, Hawthorne, while helping us to confront the "beat" writers (who, to be sure, are more than the label implies). The very fact that Bowles is a kind of turning point in our recent literary history makes us realize that his work—his very life—is the stuff of legends. But it is critical to stress that the legend is his *creation*, his *artifice*.

Although the following essays and tributes attempt to capture the true or essential Bowles, the sources of his power, they neglect, I believe, a "cold point." Bowles creates a self-enclosed world radically different from those fashioned by a dualistic Western vantage. Space does not permit me to pursue the point, but I want at least to offer a hint to future critics. Bowles believes that his words—that language itself—is insufficient, a familiar frustration in a postmodern, deconstructionist clime. Consequently, he gives us fictions in which gestures and silences reveal more than language. (There is the intrinsic irony that he must use language to subvert it.) Once again, I consider "Pages from Cold Point," which contains the clash of inadequate words, the abrupt silences, the playful paradoxes of "love."

I offer a final comment. Perhaps Bowles travels "without stopping" because he recognizes that our *world* (inner and outer geography) is at perpetual odds with our *words*. If we explore his life and art—can the two be separated?—we discover that we must enter it without the aid of reductive brackets on the order of "existentialist," "mutilation," "murder," "hallucination," "obsession"—these words, in effect, are dull and not constructive until and unless we begin to address them to the severe dynamics of Bowles's fiction. Bowles understands that criticism and fiction are, finally, merely, mutilations themselves. They instruct us—up to a point—but fail to put the pieces together, to shape existence.

## Aspects of Self: A Bowles Collage

The editors of this collection decided to create an unusual *collage*. We wrote to fifty critics, friends of Bowles, and novelists who may have been influenced by his work. We received about ten replies—a small amount, to be sure—but these replies are interesting. (So are the silences.) A representative of William Burroughs Communications, apologizing for the lack of a submission due to time factors, assured us that "Mr. Burroughs is a great admirer and personal friend of Mr. Bowles," as did a similar letter from Mrs. Ken Kesey.

We are grateful to Gordon Lish; his simple response reminds us that Bowles has always given *work* to non-mainstream periodicals in the generous spirit of William Carlos Williams. And the memoirs of Bruce Morissette and John Bernard Myers tell much about art, friendship, "time." The other comments, including Joyce Carol Oates's sympathetic defense of Bowles's short fiction, are also valuable; we appreciate them.

CHRISTOPHER SAWYER-LAUÇANNO

The Inmeuble Itesa sits on the Calle Campoamor in the western outskirts of Tangier. It is positively nondescript; twenty small apartments are squeezed into a poured-concrete shell five stories high. A tiny shop selling sodas and mineral water, some pastries, and an odd variety of canned goods occupies the first floor facing the new American consulate compound, an imposing structure with a high wall encircling the premises. Around the back is the entrance to the apartment house itself. Paul Bowles lives in three and a half rooms on the top floor.

The door to number 20 opens a crack. A faint whiff of kif invades the gloomy hallway; Bowles peers out, recognizes me. "I was expecting you yesterday," he mildly admonishes. I explain that I missed the ferry from Algeciras and had to stay an extra day in Spain. He accepts my explanation and turns to grumbling about the trans-Mediterranean ferry service. We shake hands; he beckons me to come inside. We pass

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through a narrow hall, made even narrower by a congeries of leather suitcases stacked to shoulder height against the left wall. They are worn, stained, and plastered with stickers from hotels and shipping lines, mute reminders of a life of travel, of adventure in exotic geographies. We pass through a beaded curtain into the sitting room.

Even though it is mid-afternoon the "sala" is still fairly dark. A large room, it is divided into two sections: Just beyond the entrance is the sitting area; the other part of the room, to the visitor's right, is open. A table in the far corner is piled with books and journals in several languages. A row of windows, giving onto a veranda filled with plants, runs the length of the far wall. In the sitting area are three small couches, really large cushions with backs, which sit in a triangular configuration, a large, low Moroccan table in the center. A couple of paintings by Ahmed Yacoubi, a friend for many years, sit on the floor, waiting, as they have perhaps for years, to be hung. In the corner is another table holding a lamp and two unframed ink drawings by Mohammed Mrabet, which are propped up against the wall. The walls, themselves, are basically bare, although one wall contains a built-in bookcase of dark wood. The shelves are wide. One of them, on the far left at chest level, serves as a repository for a small African carving. Above it, on several shelves, are Bowles's own works, in various editions and translations. The shelves below are filled with reel-to-reel tapes, the original Moroccan music recordings made during the late 1950s. The center panel of the bookcase holds the works of friends: Burroughs, Purdy, and Williams, among others. A separate shelf contains Jane Bowles's books.

Bowles has lived in this little apartment since 1957 and for the past decade has rarely ventured far from it. "Why should I go anywhere else?" he says. At first this strikes me as an odd sentiment coming from a man who has spent a major portion of his life traveling, moving from one distant place to another. But then he explains further, "I never intended to stay, it just happened. And now, well, Tangier is where I feel more comfortable than anywhere else."

Bowles puffs deliberately on his kif cigarette, its butt end encased in a slender, black cigarette holder. A small trail of smoke perfumes the air as it curls upward. He takes one final puff and then carefully removes the cigarette from the holder, discarding it into an ashtray that already holds the remains of several others.

"Would you like some tea, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Please."

Bowles walks back through the beaded curtain and into the narrow

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kitchen located off the hallway. He walks with conviction but with a stealth-like lightness, his footsteps barely audible in the quiet room. He puts the water on and returns to the sitting room.

Bowles seems considerably younger than seventy-five. It is not so much that he is in remarkably good physical shape, rather it is his stance in the world, his ability to live completely in the present, that belies his age. This does not mean that he does not talk about the past. Indeed, his conversation is peppered with anecdotes about old friends and enchanting adventures, but he relates these tales in a matter-of-fact way, not as nostalgic reflections of a perfect past.

We begin by talking about Borges, who has just died in Geneva. I ask Bowles about how he came to translate Borges's story, "The Circular Ruins," back in the 1940s.

Well, I did it for *View*, a very slick art and literary magazine that Charles-Henri Ford was editing. I was on the board of editors. Ford was always looking around for the latest modernist work and Borges seemed, and still seems, a leader. I don't think we got permission, we just did it.

The conversation moves on to Genet, who has also died recently. Bowles is reading his last work, a book on the Palestinians. "I never met Genet, but I've always admired him," he says. "He was, of course, well known in Tangier. [Mohamed] Choukri got to know him, and wrote a little book about him, *Jean Genet in Tangier*, which I translated."

Despite Bowles's not unfounded reputation as a cynic, he is the most lighthearted pessimist I have ever met. He laughs easily, obviously enjoys the company of friends and acquaintances who come to visit daily, and participates avidly in conversations, often in several languages, on practically any topic. Always somewhat reserved and conservatively dressed, usually in a turtleneck or shirt and tie and jacket, he gives the appearance of a benign elderly gentleman—charming, alert, and affable—who has never done anything terribly unusual.

There is more to this than just a surface image: Bowles genuinely dislikes drawing attention to himself. He becomes noticeably uncomfortable when accolades are laid upon him and while he doesn't deny his accomplishments, he doesn't advertise them either. When the conversation turns to a discussion about his writing, he listens attentively, politely allowing the speaker to comment, but rarely confirms or denies that the commentator has hit upon something terribly important or critically insightful. A frequent response is likely to be, "Really?", or, "I suppose you could look at it that way."

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When asked, for example, about Gore Vidal's assessment, that Bowles is still the odd man out, writing as if *Moby Dick* had never been written, Bowles smiles, a quizzical look on his face and turns the inquiry into a discussion of where the term "odd man out" comes from. "I don't know what he means by 'odd man out.' Is it a sports' expression?" he asks. When I try to move the conversation back to Vidal's remark, Bowles does admit that he never did get through *Moby Dick* ("Started it several times"), but quickly adds that he did read *Omoo* and *Typee*.

Occasionally, though, Bowles does volunteer an observation, but usually it is to explain why or how something was written. Even then, his perspective is as neutral as possible. When he talks about the characters in his novels or stories, for instance, it is in the same tones used to describe real people in real situations. His creations—Kit and Port, Dyer and Thami, Stenham and Lee, the Slades and Vero—populate a territory lying somewhere between the imagination and physical reality. A casual eavesdropper, hearing Bowles describe why his literary offspring acted the way they did, might well think that he is witnessing a slightly gossipy conversation about old friends:

His real name was Grover; he was called Grovero as a joke. And from Grovero it became Vero. . . . I liked Luchita with her terrible drawings. She was a real hippie, I think. She prefigured Haight-Ashbury. They also drew pictures on the sidewalk with colored crayon and colored chalk. What did she say? She said she earned 8,000 old francs a day doing it in St. Germain-des-Prés. I think they could do it here too. The only thing is, you better not try.

Bowles's neutrality vis-à-vis his own work (and life) has been seen by some as reflecting a lack of passion, or at least involvement. Bowles does not see it like that. For him, neutrality is more than just being reticent or private. It intrinsically relates to ego, which he claims not to have. When asked, for instance, about competition between writers, he says quite simply that he refuses to play. Fame, too, is an abstract concept, so removed from his thought that when asked directly how he feels about it, he misunderstands the question:

"Spain?" he queries.

"Fame," I reply.

"Oh, fame. I think it only means something if you live in the place where you're famous," he says. "It doesn't mean much if you live on Juan Fernandez or in the Aleutians."

While Bowles might like to compare Tangier to these remote locales, it has never been entirely cut off from the rest of the world. In

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the 1950s and 1960s visitors arrived in droves, among them Peggy Guggenheim, Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Libby Holman, and Allen Ginsberg. And visitors still seek him out: a photographer from Paris, a Spanish academic, young and not-so-young writers. Friends from long ago come too, such as William Burroughs and the painter/art critic Maurice Grosser.

One constant visitor is Mohammed Mrabet, the Moroccan storyteller. Bowles started translating Mrabet's stories, recorded in Maghrebi Arabic, in the mid-1960s. The first, a novel called *Love with a Few Hairs*, appeared in 1967 and received an enthusiastic response. Since then, Bowles has translated more than a half-dozen more. Unlike Bowles, Mrabet has a considerable ego. Handsome in a thuggish sort of way, with large dark eyes that burn with intensity, Mrabet dominates the conversation. Speaking fluent Spanish—he worked for several years in Spain and on Majorca—he regales me with tales of Morocco, of magic and trickery and kif-inspired stratagems, of his personal misadventures abroad. It is clear that Bowles has heard many of these stories before; it is also clear that he enjoys them. Like a proud parent he encourages Mrabet to show off, to recount specific tales. Often his stories are humorous; more often the humor is tinged with violence or suffering.

Even in Spanish Mrabet is an enchanting storyteller. Animated and lively, he acts out each of his accounts, hands flailing the air. At times he even rises from the cushions to emphasize a particular point. Mrabet claims to be fifty-four; Bowles disputes this: "Late forties, at the most." It is an old controversy.

Mrabet first learned his art in the cafés, an art that has all but disappeared. Instead of listening to stories or music, Bowles notes that now, "they've got the television going." This devaluing of traditional art has even affected Bowles. Despite the fact that he is probably more responsible than any other Westerner for preserving the last vestiges of a rapidly vanishing Morocco, both through his extensive field recordings of its traditional music made for the Library of Congress in late 1950s and through the transcription and translation of Mrabet and other storytellers, he has no reputation in Morocco, except possibly a negative one:

I've been attacked various times in the paper for being a neo-colonialist. First of all they claim that I wrote all the translations that I do and that the Moroccans don't exist. Mrabet doesn't exist. And of course he got pretty angry about that. And then they said that yes, Mrabet exists, but he's just a *pantin*, a marionette being manipulated by the Americans and implying

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practically that the C.I.A. was behind it. Idiotic! They didn't really like what he does because for them it's a Morocco of the past. They don't want to admit that there's any magic today. There is, and he knows it, but officially there's no such thing. And there's no kif so you can't write about that. Mrabet just writes about what he imagines and sees without any political overtones whatever. But for them it's very reactionary, practically wicked. They consider a writer really a journalist and he's supposed to write about present-day topics. A fiction writer is looked upon askance, as telling a bunch of lies.

In the United States and Europe, though, things are a bit different. After years of being largely ignored by critics and readers, Bowles is finally beginning to receive some notoriety. In the popular press, *Vanity Fair*, *Esquire*, and the *Village Voice* have all recently published pieces on him and his work. An interview is now available on video cassette and a Dutch film crew has recently finished a documentary for the Netherlands Broadcasting Corporation that will be aired in late January in Holland. In addition, Black Sparrow Press has just issued Jeffrey Miller's critical bibliography of Bowles's work, and I am writing his biography. More importantly, though, his books, with the exception of *Yallah* and a few translations, are all in print, finding new readers every day. His music too is being revived, largely through the efforts of Bennett Lerner, who has included Bowles's piano music on two albums he recently recorded of contemporary American composers.

Although Bowles does not write on a schedule, rather when "the mood hits," his days have a definite pattern to them. It is well known, for instance, that mornings and late evenings are off limits to visitors. In the early afternoon, Abdelouahid, his driver, arrives to take Bowles to the post office; a maid comes five days a week and Mrabet comes daily to bring him lunch and dinner. He is cautious these days about what he eats. Though slightly less fanatical than Mrabet, who never eats in cafés for fear of being poisoned, Bowles still rarely goes out for a meal.

The tea water is bubbling. Bowles excuses himself and goes back into the kitchen. He carefully spoons some English pekoe into a pot and pours in the water. "Do you like lemon?" he asks. He is already slicing a lemon in half. "Yes," I reply. He squeezes half a lemon into each clear-glass tea cup. While the tea steeps we make small talk about food and drink. A bit of nostalgia creeps into the conversation: "Moroccan produce isn't nearly as good as it used to be. They export the best." He pours the tea. I offer to help him bring it into the other room. He declines as he loads the cups and a sugar bowl onto a small brass tray.

In the other room we sit quietly. From somewhere come strains of

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contemporary Arabic music. "Moroccan?" I ask. "No, Egyptian," he says confidently. "They're crazy about Egyptian singers, always have been." Outside a horn honks incessantly. Soon the muezzin will be calling the faithful to prayer over electronically amplified sound systems. The aroma from the tea blends with the kif. I take a sip. It is delicious.

OLEG KERENSKY

Paul Bowles at seventy-five is still living in Tangier and still the witty but intensely private person one knows from his stories and from his autobiography. He has no telephone, his mail is delivered to a post-office box, he wears a suit, though no tie, at home on a hot summer afternoon, and he preserves old-fashioned courtesy and reticence in a modern world he dislikes. When a mutual friend, intending to reassure him and put him at his ease for the interview, introduced me as "an honorable man," he promptly asked, "What do you mean, like Brutus?" Somehow, this was amusing and charming, not rude, seemed typical.

The inveterate, possibly compulsive, traveler of the past no longer leaves Morocco. "Traveling used to be a pleasure. Now everyone is moving in all directions, there are no porters, and we are treated like animals. Planes are a form of hell—they should send animals by plane. I would like to visit the States for two weeks to see old friends, but everyone tells me it's awful there now. Anyway, there's no way of getting there—I've never flown the Atlantic, there are no passenger ships from here, and freighters won't take people over seventy."

Has anything improved during his lifetime, has there been any progress? He pauses, then replies with a challenge: "Tell me what!" I suggest that women, blacks, and homosexuals have achieved new rights and better status. He says: "It's clear that Blacks have every reason to complain about their position in American society. Women also, if to a lesser extent. On the other hand, homosexuals can't expect to be granted special recognition as an oppressed group, any more than pigeon fanciers or yachting enthusiasts."

Paul Bowles does not agree with those critics who maintain that his autobiography was not sufficiently personal, that it should have devoted more space to the description of his reactions and the definition of his preferences. "Everything is there," he says. "I agree with Flaubert: the writer himself means nothing, and his work means everything. If the writer's personality is more interesting than his work, then the work isn't worth much."

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Does the fact that his work is often described as autobiographical account for his influence on the Beats? He doubts how much he has influenced them. "I met them, but they came to see Bill Burroughs, and I had the feeling that they didn't know my work. I wasn't conscious of writing anti-realistic or post-realistic novels, and I certainly wasn't trying to do so. I may have had an unconscious reaction against realism, but I don't think I'm an innovative writer."

Influences on him? "Sartre and Camus influenced my thought, but not my writing. I was influenced by Borges—Borges would influence anyone." Denying any conscious reaction against any writer or style, he said simply, "If I don't like a book, I forget it." Was he affected by criticism? "That would be madness. I don't write to please other people. I wouldn't know how to do it. I do question my own work—was I right or wrong? I never make up my mind."

Asked if he is writing a new novel, his "no" is long-drawn-out, emphatic, sounds like *never*. "I can't imagine starting a novel now." He is less emphatic about composing music. "I haven't composed for two years, but I may do so again. Mainly I'm occupied with correcting proofs of French and Spanish translations of my books and my own translations from Moroccan Arabic." In the past, writing and composing were complementary. "I composed for a time in one room, then wrote in another. It's good to do both."

Tangier, like everything else in his world, has changed for the worse. But he still finds it fascinating. "The point of living in Tangier is not knowing what will happen next. That's part of the attraction." There are hints of the difficulties of being a foreign writer in an Arab country. "They are suspicious of us because we may give the wrong impression and make too many inquiries. They're afraid that foreign writers may give bad publicity to the country and depict it as it really is, not as they wish it were. I wouldn't be here by this time if I were a journalist. Novels, they overlook." The government once told him that there's no point in traveling around to find things out—"the Ministry of Information could tell me everything I needed to know. Trying to discover on my own would not be advisable."

"It's difficult for Moroccan writers because there is no tradition. If you are an Arab writer, you are competing with the Koran—that is the ideal book and there are no others. How can you be a writer when the book has already been written? People here have become more religious than they were previously. They try to be true Moslems, though they find it very taxing to observe all the rituals. The majority, not fanatics,

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have become more tied to religious observances, though many young Moroccans would doubtless prefer more individual freedom."

Paul Bowles does not express himself on the religion or the politics of the country where he has lived for more than half his life. According to him, these things are none of his business.

REGINA WEINREICH

He is reserved and elegant, a gentleman from a bygone era in fine European jackets and pressed slacks. His blond-white hair and bone-thin physique give the impression of delicately carved ivory. He carries a cigarette holder through which the smoke of black Sobranies or kif-filled cigarettes thickens the air. At seventy-three, the American composer and writer Paul Bowles is a principal attraction for Western travelers to Tangier.

Bowles first came to Morocco in 1931, at the insistence of Gertrude Stein; fitting, then, is his continuation of her tradition in Tangier. His "salon" is a dark living room of rugs and floor cushions against wood paneling and bookcases, with a fireplace that is used for warmth in the North African winter. If it were not for the muezzin's cry from the nearby mosque, one could mistake it for a modest place in Greenwich Village.

Bowles's lifestyle is so spare that he does without a phone; callers must arrive unannounced. He greets each one as if expected, graciously moving guests through a small foyer stacked high with suitcases and trunks to the living room, and then he retreats into the kitchen to prepare tea. On a given afternoon, the room fills with admirers sipping and chatting as Bowles springs up from his floor cushion to show a rare album, an out-of-print book, a painting by one of his friends Ahmed Yacoubi or Brion Gysin. The conversation shifts facilely from the best belly dancing to the island he once owned off Sri Lanka.

"I don't find murder, or the possibility of murder sad, do you?" he remarks casually and without irony. "All human beings are capable of it, given the right circumstances." Such statements together with his distinctly cold-blooded yet pure writing style have made Paul Bowles an international cult figure. The Bowles mystique is also the result of an adventurous and celebrity-filled past, his link to Paris in the Twenties and Thirties, to a time when it was still possible to enjoy the luxury of sea travel and picturesque hotels in exotic settings unscarred by technology and tourism.

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Bowles has a fame so special that when the School of Visual Arts offered a writers' workshop in Tangier, featuring this noted expatriate, his name alone drew a dozen or more students per session, even though few American bookstores carry his titles. I was only too aware of his allure when I was asked to teach with him during the summer of 1983, and surprised to find Bowles so courteous, friendly, and charming as we planned our course in the comfort of his home, just a zigzag from our classroom at The American School.

In class, Bowles was more presence than performance. He does not consider himself a teacher but he gave both encouragement and conference time most generously. Still students were eager for definitive statements on the value of their work; instead he insisted obsessively on proper language. He would point out grammatical errors, intent on finding every one. He even read a 324-page novel, making corrections in the margins for typos, and said to its writer, "I can't tell you a thing. You know what you are doing."

One incident reveals a definite language gap. Bowles claimed to have understood a story well enough but one thing puzzled him, "What does 'grossed out' mean?" Our students were amused that he'd never heard this expression, perfectly acceptable to them, and offered, "disgusted me," "nauseated me," "moved me to vomit." "Ah." He seemed to see. He then recounted a scene in a Paris restaurant where he had ordered a steak tartare. After a bite or so he realized that maggots were racing around his dish and then over his mouth and face. "Does that illustrate it?" The class was writhing. "I guess steak tartare was the wrong thing to order," he finished.

Despite his reticence on student work, he is matter-of-fact on his own stories. "They just come out that way," he explained his technique. But he does offer this advice to writers: "You have to be in the fictional world until it's more real than the table you can touch. You have to tell the truth that transcends fact."

Paul Bowles started out as a composer and worked with Aaron Copland, Nadia Boulanger, Orson Welles, William Saroyan, Philip Barry, Lillian Hellman, and long-time friend Tennessee Williams. He is credited with the music for "Liberty Jones," "Watch on the Rhine," "The Glass Menagerie," to name a few. His career in fiction began only after he had married Jane Auer in 1938 and after she had written *Two Serious Ladies* (1941).

Bowles's writing in general has the character of something sinister, as if some unnamed evil has won out, reflecting a new age naturalism. From the viewpoint of one culture's glimpse of another, the stories

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show characters who are detached, aimless, and spiritually bereft in exotic locations where they cannot help but fail. From the first story, "Pages from Cold Point," Bowles has presaged, "Our civilization is doomed to a short life" and from there on his fiction dramatizes why.

Perhaps some aspect of his life can explain this attitude that comes out in the work. The Bowleses were a dazzling young couple, as the story goes, he the talented composer and she a bright, original, funny personality whose writing was regarded the finest in America by Tennessee Williams. They lived in W. H. Auden's rooming house for artists and then in a two-room apartment in Brooklyn Heights vacated by Gypsy Rose Lee. By 1948 they were situated in Morocco, where they were entertained in the finest European homes. Then something happened. As Bowles's writing flourished, Jane's was stymied. As recorded in her biography, *A Little Original Sin*, which came out in 1981, Jane would tell friends that she had to write but could not, that Paul was the writer in the family, not she. Her health began to deteriorate—"from excessive drinking," claims Bowles. But another story persists about a powerful Moroccan woman named Cherifa who styled herself a witch, and who, in the employ of Jane Bowles, poisoned her. Jane Bowles suffered a stroke in 1956 and after years of treatment in sanitoriums she eventually died in Malaga, Spain, in 1973, blind and unable to move or speak. Bowles still finds her tragedy incomprehensible and dates Jane's decline from the time their sexual life together ended. Jane had affectionately dubbed her husband "Gloompot."

During most of his marriage, Bowles traveled compulsively (both with and without Jane) through Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Bowles explains this wanderlust: "Why must one live in one place? Especially the place one already knows?" But he has lived in one place, preferring not to leave Tangier, not to travel by plane, not even to visit other Moroccan cities. Bowles has written, "I did not choose to live in Tangier permanently; it happened."

For Bowles, the main attraction of his chosen home is that Tangier "has been touched by fewer of the negative aspects of contemporary civilization than most cities of its size." But the Tangier of today is a place of flux. The city is expanding, with construction sites everywhere. Even in the most quaint and ancient-looking sections of the medina, television antennae adorn roofs. During the Ramadan night, when Moslems break their day-long fast, King Hassan II in the midst of prayer is broadcast live. Sometimes "Dallas" is shown on three different channels simultaneously. Still, Tangier is a place where women walk

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outside entirely covered by djellabah and veil, bed sheets are laundered by hand, and Europeans of every class can afford a servant or two.

The Bowles ménage consists of a housekeeper, a driver for his tan Mustang, and Mohammed Mrabet, with whom he has one of the most unusual literary collaborations in the world. Mrabet barely reads or writes even in his own Moghrebi. Instead he recites into a tape recorder and Bowles translates his stories without editing them. Mrabet frequents Bowles's study, which looks out to thousands of houses in the distance and a strip of the sea. At least once during his daily visit he prays to Allah, accompanied by the chirping of canaries in cages on the windowsill. The excessive consumption of kif keeps Mrabet's eyes at half-mast. By afternoon he is professing to have smoked too much, his speech slowed to a slur. At times he is given to boasting; "I am Riffian and I am proud," he bellows. One day, wearing a tee-shirt commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Brooklyn Bridge under a traditional embroidered vest, he rushed into the living room announcing that he had just composed five stories. I wondered whether he is always this prolific. "No, almost never," Bowles grimaced, "and those days he's terrible." Many of Mrabet's stories involve a kif-smoking hero who is rescued from calamity by the intervention of Allah. One evening Mrabet prepared couscous and told me the secret of his storytelling: he fishes early in the morning and then arrives at Paul's to tape the tales told to him by a giant fish.

Mrabet has damaged his stomach so irrevocably with hashish and majoun that he is now permitted only his kif, which he smokes in the tiny bowls of his sebsi. Refusing to indulge in anyone else's, Mrabet buys the kif and cleans it for Bowles and himself with the swift motions of a cook chopping parsley. Bowles keeps his own share on a low table beside his favorite cushion where he empties and refills his cigarettes. Bowles has analyzed this habit, unable to determine the direction of his escape, "I cannot decide whether I'm running from or to," he told me. Friends have commented that he has grown increasingly detached. Yet his blue eyes remain clear and his wit acute. Perhaps like Stenham, his protagonist in *The Spider's House*, Bowles believes that "a man must at all costs keep some part of himself outside and beyond life."

During my frequent visits to the Bowles "salon," we often talked alone, sipping tea. After a few puffs on his cigarette, he would remove it from its holder and pass it to me. One afternoon, I gave him tapes featuring classic American jazz. On another, he taught me about the different kinds of North African music, distinguishing Djellalah from Djebaala in neatly rounded syllables. We listened to King Crimson's

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version of "The Sheltering Sky" on two sets of earphones plugged into the same walkman. He reminisced often about Jane, how he had learned Yiddish expressions like *yenta* from her; he spoke of Tennessee, how excessive he had been with everything, and what a shock his death had been, nevertheless; he talked about the literary life of Tangier, how William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* had started out as pages randomly piled on a hotel floor with footprints, food stains, and rat turd.

Bowles told me he never writes about his life—"I rub it out as I live it"—except in autobiography. He had given me a copy of *Without Stopping*. The dust jacket of the British edition prominently lists people whose lives have touched his. It reads like a who's who, including Francis Bacon, Truman Capote, Salvador Dali, John Huston, Anaës Nin, Jean-Paul Sartre, Ezra Pound, Katharine Hepburn, and so on. I commented on his resemblance to James Dean on the cover photo. More like Danny Kaye, he thought. But after I had read about his life one thing puzzled me, now I knew what had happened to him, but not how he felt. Bowles looked shocked, "Well, that is what I intended. Why should I write about my feelings? I don't think they should be written about. What difference does it make?"

I wondered whether this evasion, something I had accepted as part of his detached side, had anything to do with his father, a failed concert pianist who had turned to dentistry and who often had punished his son for his childishness by taking away his notebooks. Had he been bitter and envious of his son's talent? "I don't think he wanted any children at all," Bowles explained to me, "but in those days they really didn't have abortions. If there had been, they would have had me over a barrel."

"Did that experience influence your not having any children," I asked.

"No," said Bowles, "it never occurred to me. I always thought that to have children you had to have money—which I did not have. And besides that, Jane was absolutely adamant. She did not want children. She was terrified."

"Terrified of children?"

"No. Of having a child. The pain. The idea horrified her."

"Was there something about your individual sexualities that prevented it," I pressed on. "Wasn't there a time when you stopped having relations with one another and went on to others?"

"Millicent Dillon, Jane's biographer, took all of that so seriously," replied Bowles with his usual brevity.

"Do you mean Jane's relationship with women? What about

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Cherifa, the Moroccan woman from the medina who allegedly poisoned her?"

"That was part of Jane's interest in 'characters,'" said Bowles. "If we saw a monster on the street, Jane would say, 'She's such a character. I love her.' It had to be an outlandish and repulsive character."

"Do you mean to say that there was no real relationship between Jane and the Moroccan woman?"

"There was," said Bowles unhappily, "for many, many years. Seventeen years. Jane would say, 'She's my daughter. She means everything to me. I won't let you send her away.' Cherifa was insufferable, a horror."

Bowles is more lively and anecdotal on the subject of his books. I'd commented on *The Spider's House*, how much I loved the beginning, the way it starts off as a bildungsroman of a boy in the Fez medina. "But then suddenly it stops when the Europeans come in," Bowles broke in. "Gore Vidal objected. He said, 'If you'd only gone on with Amar all the way through the book and left the Europeans out, I'd have thought it the best book I'd ever read. But I stopped thinking that the moment the Europeans came on the scene.'" Bowles objected to Vidal's misreading. "I wasn't trying to describe the life of a youth in the medina. I was trying to describe the disintegration of a culture at the hands of colonialism. That's what the book was about."

We went on to discuss how *The Sheltering Sky* is also about the impact of one culture upon another, the dramatic effect of the Islamic culture on the Americans. I observed that in some of the short stories as well the reader knows that the characters have misunderstood something integral to the culture. "They've just blundered ahead," agreed Bowles, "gone on not realizing that it was very bad etiquette. That might end in tragedy. People do that when they go into a culture they know nothing about. They push in where they are not wanted. Sometimes the results can be a matter of life and death."

We were reaching the political terrain of much of Bowles's work. "Of course," said I, "when countries become colonized, there is a rationalization that something is being done for civilization, as in the case of the French in Morocco or the British in India."

"Yes," Bowles agreed, "colonizers always think that they are helping and that they are right. They pretend to think that."

I became curious about Bowles's relationship with the present Moroccan regime, no longer in the hands of the French. I decided they must regard this eminent writer as an important national treasure. "Oh no, nothing could be farther from the truth," Bowles looked at me in

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amazement at this foolish remark. "They regard me as 'European,' in sympathy with the French. I cannot leave here for fear they won't allow me to return. I fully expect them to throw my things out on the street when I die. That's what they do here. And when packages arrive, they are so suspicious I have to stand at the post office for half a day. Sometimes they don't arrive."

"I won't send you any packages then," I said. "I thought I would send you cassettes, but I guess I'll send letters."

"They might arrive but they'll probably be opened and photographed."

"All right, I won't write anything risqué," I said playfully.

"They couldn't care less."

"All right then, I won't write anything political."

"Political," Bowles repeated, "that's what they're interested in. People could write the most obscene letters in English. It wouldn't bother them at all. But if you mention the word 'King' or 'Police,' then they have to translate the whole thing and decide what is meant."

"Fortunately your name isn't King," I laughed. "Paul King."

Paul Bowles broke into story: "Once there was a General Drum in the U.S. Army who happened to be in Mexico. I sent a wire to Jane. She had gone on to America to visit her parents in Watkins Glen, New York, and had taken a lot of our stuff with her. I was concerned about what happened to a particular drum that we'd bought. We had a correspondence about it. I sent a wire saying, SCHWAB SAYS DRUM NOT IN BODEGA. PLEASE SEND DETAILS, and the FBI went immediately to Watkins Glen, New York. They wanted to know all sorts of things. Where was bodega? The bodega was simply the storeroom of the hotel. What was drum? The drum was simply the drum. The drum had been mislaid in Mexico City. They got Jane into a corner and began asking her questions:

'Where were you in November of 1938?'

'I don't know.'

'Try and think back and remember.'

"One agent was pretending to be terribly nice: 'We're not trying to bother you, Mrs. Bowles. We just have a few questions.' The other was kind of sinister, pacing threateningly, not saying a word.

"Jane said, 'Well, where was I? Guatemala? Oh, I was in the south of France at that point. Panama?' She kept giving them different places.

"They finally said, 'You move around a lot, don't you?'

'Well, my husband moves around.'

'Why does he do that, Mrs. Bowles?'

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'I don't know. I guess he's nervous.' "

The Café Hafa is a Tangier spot virtually unknown to tourists. There is still a prayer room off to the side, with straw mats on which the locals pray to Allah. Almost a setting from one of Bowles's books, the café overhangs the water from a high and steep cliff. Mrabet, Bowles, and I are perched midair, drinking mint tea. Mrabet is animated, planning the house he is building in the countryside near Tangier; Bowles is calm, looking out to the blue space, cigarette poised in holder.

"Do you regret anything about your life," I ask him.

"How can I regret things that happened, that have become part of my life? It doesn't make sense."

"How about things that didn't happen?"

"Well, I say, Thank Heavens!"

## RICHARD H. GOLDSSTONE

Apart from Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, and Whitman, which of the notable American writers did not succumb—for a time at least—to the allure of Europe or the South Seas? There were those who went away to be instructed or inspired; others who sought to see with their own eyes what had been reflected in the words they had read; and in a few instances there were the diehard expatriates—Henry James, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and most recently, Paul Bowles—who set out to escape America.

Of James, Wharton, Stein, Pound, and Eliot one could say, reading the writings of their exile, that they did not, in fact, wholly escape. In all their work their roots are palpable, their memories intact. They never lose their point of view: that of an American observing England or France or Italy. Nor was their intention to do otherwise. Pound had no wish to be Italian; James, English; Stein or Wharton, Parisienne. Each found that although they could flourish, even luxuriate (and, ultimately, peacefully die) on foreign soil, they quite consciously chose not to relinquish the American identity of their art.<sup>1</sup>

Paul Bowles at seventy-five differs from his distinguished expatriate predecessors in one fundamental respect: his total separation from his homeland can be inferred not merely from his autobiography, *Without Stopping* (1972). More important, when viewed chronologically, his published fiction exposes the incalculable distance of the journey he has taken from his Long Island, New York, origins.<sup>2</sup>

Bowles was a sixteen-year-old high school student on Long Island when, in the "Letter from Paris" of the *New Yorker*, he discovered the

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existence of *transition*, to which he forthwith dispatched some poems, which Jolas published in the Spring 1928 issue. That weekly "Letter from Paris" persuaded the young Bowles that "Paris was the center of all existence; I could feel its glow when I faced eastward as a Moslem feels the light from Mecca. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

As a consequence of that feeling (and of the gulf that separated him from his father, a successful, pragmatic practitioner of dentistry) Bowles in his freshman year at the University of Virginia sold all his possessions, except the clothes on his back, and at age eighteen, without his parents' knowledge or consent, boarded a ship with less than fifty dollars left in his wallet, arriving in Paris with half that amount.

Two years later, Bowles and his composition teacher, Aaron Copland, began frequenting the Paris apartment of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas. It was during Bowles's and Copland's visit to Belignin, where the two women had their summer home, that Gertrude Stein in characteristically Sibylline fashion urged the teacher and his pupil not to summer on the French Riviera (Bowles's choice) nor at St. Jean-de-Luz (Copland's), but to go instead to Tangier. In heeding Stein's pronouncement, Bowles unknowingly had made the most fateful decision of his life. For though Bowles's 1931 visit to Tangier was, in the years ahead, to be followed by sojourns in New York, California, South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, Italy, Spain, Thailand, and Ceylon, it was Morocco which was to be the center of the sphere from which he radiated. After Bowles's marriage to Jane Auer and after the conclusion of World War II, Bowles at thirty-six fixed on Tangier as the permanent home for himself and his wife. After his wife's death in 1972 Bowles rarely left Morocco. He, in fact, very seldom now leaves the environs of Tangier. The mails and visitors keep him adequately informed.

Bowles's professional career as a writer did not begin until he was thirty-five, when he had already established himself as a composer and music critic. After publishing stories in several prestigious New York magazines and receiving a contract from Doubleday for a novel, Bowles decided in 1947 to leave the United States and settle, once and for all, in Morocco, which somehow he felt would best nourish his literary talent. North Africa had already been the setting for some of the most arresting of his stories. So long as he earned his livelihood from music, New York served him best; but as a writer he could live where he pleased.

Even before Bowles set out for Morocco, the outlines of the novel which was to become *The Sheltering Sky* had already begun to take shape.

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But the details of the work and its actual writing did not come together until the Bowleses established themselves in Tangier (then an international enclave, independent of both Spain and Morocco). Like "A Distant Episode," its short precursor, *The Sheltering Sky* has as its theme the perilous fascination which the multi-tribal complex of the Sahara exerts upon restless and reckless American visitors. On one level Bowles was doing what Henry James had done earlier. James had discerned and described with brilliant precision the mores, values, and attitudes separating Americans from their European counterparts, and in *The Sheltering Sky*, Bowles explores the unbridgeable chasm which separates the European/American from the peoples of the North African-Moslem-Bedouin-Berber culture.

This interconnected theme—the obsessive fascination which the Moghreb culture exerts upon certain disaffected Americans and Europeans and the dangers inherent in attempting to gratify so futile an obsession—pervades all of Bowles's Moroccan writings.

The theme first manifests itself in those fictions wherein an American or European interacts with a succession of varied Arabs: students, shopkeepers, nomads, hustlers, hotel keepers, beggars, or prostitutes. No connection is made; disappointment, or much worse, is the inevitable outcome of such meetings. Even when, as in "Tea on the Mountain," sexual desire bridges the gap between a young American woman writer and a Moroccan student not yet out of the Lycée, no resolution occurs, no connection made. Only stasis is achieved. Work such as this, together with the more highly complex *The Sheltering Sky*—these accounts of chance meetings, purposeless quests, and horrendous confrontations—symbolizes the initial phase of Bowles's artistic and actual withdrawal from his native American concerns and involvements.

Next, as Bowles became more immersed in North African life, his stories began to depict Moroccans interacting only with Moroccans, eliminating from the narrative the American/European actor or observer. As a result, such stories as "The Delicate Prey," "A Thousand Days to Mokhtar," or "By the Water" seem less the products of observation; they emerge more seemingly from what Bowles has overheard or been told. Indeed, they could pass as transcriptions into English of Arab accounts of extraordinary episodes or recollections filtered through a skilled writer's mind. Artistically, Bowles had shed another layer of his American identity.

In the next noteworthy stage of Bowles's literary career are translations and transliterations from both classic Arabic and colloquial Arabic sources. Bowles initiated this phase of his work when he

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transcribed from Moghrebi, the street Arabic of Morocco, material dictated to him by two gifted but illiterate Moroccans, Driss ben Hamed Charhadi and Mohammed Mrabet. In addition, he undertook to translate from classical Arabic the autobiography of a Moroccan Riffian, Mohamed Choukri, who grew up illiterate but who at twenty learned to read and write the classical Arabic which Bowles does not know. Working closely with Bowles, Choukri verbally translated his text into a mélange of Moghrebi, Spanish, and French so that in Bowles's English version it was published in 1973 as *For Bread Alone*.

The ultimate step that Bowles could have taken to separate himself from his American roots would have been to write in Arabic. That step he did not take; but he clearly seems resolved to spend the remainder of his life in Morocco. In the fall of 1986, for example, he elected, for a serious surgical operation, a hospital in Rabat rather than one in Spain or France. In almost twenty years Bowles has been outside of Morocco only once; in his conversations with visiting friends he has stated that he has no plans to leave his resident country.

It is not that Bowles has "gone native," that he wholly identifies himself with Arabic culture. In most respects he lives in Tangier very much the unreconstructed American. In his thinking, as revealed in his conversation, there is not the slightest whiff of Islam. Years ago he gave up his house in the Casbah, the ancient native quarter of Tangier, and since then has inhabited a modest flat on the top floor of a modern elevator building, away from the city center and a short distance from the Spanish consulate. All that distinguishes his quarters from a Greenwich Village apartment is that the furnishings are Moroccan pillows and bolsters rather than chairs and sofas.

In his personal appearance, Bowles could be mistaken for a colonial governor: in midsummer he receives early visitors attired in a well-pressed beige summer suit, shirt and (often) tie, and attends informal dinners to which he is frequently invited, similarly clad. Friends dropping in unannounced are likely to find Bowles in polo shirt and slacks, his concession to Tangier climate, which can reach the humid nineties. He mixes easily and affably with the small permanent colony of American and British residents of Tangier. Now that Barbara Hutton has died, Bowles is its only international celebrity, a status he accepts with philosophic-ironic resignation. Although he is often a guest at official diplomatic functions, except for a few Moroccan friends of long standing, Bowles has not become integrated into native Moroccan social circles.

As early in his life as possible, Bowles broke away from the

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conventional Protestant world of his parents and family to ally himself with the bohemian circles of musicians, choreographers, painters, playwrights, poets, composers, actors, and writers and their camp followers. Many of those associates communicate with Bowles, keeping him abreast of the creative circles in New York, London, and Paris. Over the years of his exile, scores of Bowles's friends have visited him in Tangier; friends of friends have looked up this legendary survivor from America's turbulent Thirties and Forties. College students, new discoverers of Bowles's stories and novels, tremulously knock on his apartment door, having bribed complaisant taxi drivers, most of whom know the way. Both invited and unexpected guests are received by Bowles with uniform courtliness and the offer of a cup of tea. His reserve is not forbidding; but it protects him from unseemly questions either about himself or about his myriad friends and former acquaintances. The impression one receives is that Bowles feels no bitterness, no anger, no regrets about the life he put behind him four decades past; but clearly he has no intention of ever renewing that life, except by long distance—the post.

There is a certain irony that Paul Bowles, among notable American writers, the most expatriate, in manner and appearance remains the most characteristically American. Affable, humorous, with a core of gentle malice when appropriate, Bowles holds views which are liberal in art and politics but conservative in most other ways. He seems, according to the testimony of old friends, no greatly different at seventy-five from what he was in his twenties and thirties. Even his appearance is not much different: he remains slender, blond, elegant, graceful, self-composed. It is difficult to visualize him as the passionate and courageous youth who left his parents, his college, his country to discover and explore a city which had come alive for him in the pages of a weekly magazine.

He returned, of course, from that first sojourn in Paris. In the war years, for example, he shared, with his wife, a house in Brooklyn Heights with Oliver Smith, Golo Mann, Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears, and W. H. Auden. A subsequent dwelling place in the Village on West Tenth Street coincided with friendships involving half the celebrated and gifted people in New York. What ultimately drew Bowles away from a life that would have gratified most men of talent, what fascination Tangier exerted over Bowles, are questions that come to mind, particularly when one is in the presence of this cool and friendly, quintessential American writer.

The answer to such questions can perhaps be found only in the

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writings as finally we remember that it was Morocco which inspired Bowles's most enduring work. At the conclusion of *Without Stopping* he wrote:

I relish the idea that in the night, all around me in my sleep, sorcery is burrowing its invisible tunnels . . . spells are being cast, poison is running its course, souls are being dispossessed of parasitic pseudo-consciousness that lurk in the unguarded recesses of the mind.

In reading those words or in talking to the man who wrote them, a visitor to Morocco is enabled to understand that while no American can truly and fully penetrate the Arab world, he can, at the very least, be enveloped by it.

<sup>1</sup> Eliot, of course, in most of his poems from *The Waste Land* (1922) to *Four Quartets* (1943) and in his dramatic works, uses English settings, creates an English ambience. But who is not aware of the American English idiom suffusing his poems, of the New England Puritan leitmotifs dominating his plays? "in its sources, in its emotional springs, [my poetry] comes from America." (T. S. Eliot, *Paris Review*, 21 [1959]), 70).

<sup>2</sup> A musicologist might discover a parallel progression in Bowles's musical compositions.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 70.

## JOYCE CAROL OATES

*The Collected Stories of Paul Bowles, 1939–1976* (Santa Barbara, 1979) offers thirty-nine stories, coldly and impeccably crafted, the work of four decades; tales set, for the most part, in Morocco, Mexico, and South America, in landscapes of a superlunary authority. (Even Bowles's Manhattan is not our Manhattan.) To state that the intensely evoked settings of Bowles's disturbing stories are usually hostile to his people—natives as well as hapless North Americans—is perhaps misleading, for the setting of a typical Bowles story possesses more life, more identity, than the human beings who find themselves trapped in it, succumbing to fates that read more like ominous parables than "stories" in the usual sense of the word. In one of his poems D. H. Lawrence speaks of a creature born "before God was love"—and it is precisely this sense of a natural world predating and excluding consciousness that Paul Bowles dramatizes so powerfully in his fiction. It is not an accident that the doomed professor (of linguistics) of the notorious story "A Distant Episode" loses his tongue before he loses his

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sanity, and his humanity, a captive of an outlaw tribe of the Sahara; nor is it chance that the American girl Aileen, visiting her mother and her mother's lesbian-companion in Colombia, in "The Echo," succumbs to an irrational violence more alarming than any she has witnessed, and while attacking her mother's lover, "uttered the greatest scream of her life"—pure sound, bestial and liberating.

Too much has been made, perhaps, of the dreamlike brutality of Bowles's imagination, which evokes a horror far more persuasive than anything in Poe, or in Gide (whom Bowles peripherally resembles). But the stories, like fairy tales, tend to dissolve into their elements because so little that is "human" in a psychological sense is given. The reader is usually outside Bowles's characters, even in those stories—"You Are Not I," "Pages from Cold Point," "Reminders of Bouselham"—in which a first-person narrator speaks. Most of the stories are terrible without being terrifying, as if the events they delineate take place outside our customary human world. A young boy is tortured and castrated in the desert by a maddened hashish smoker ("The Delicate Prey"); an Amazonian woman, living in a squalid ruin in Mexico, captures infants in order to devour their hearts and thereby gain supernatural power ("Doña Faustina"); the soul of a kif-besotted boy passes into a snake who has "the joy of pushing his fangs" into two men before he is killed ("Allal"); a sensitive young Mexican girl succumbs to the atmosphere of sadism about her, and accepts a kinship with "monstrous" spiders who live in the crevices of her bedroom wall ("At Paso Rojo"). In "Call at Corazón" a traveler abandons his alcoholic wife to an unimaginable fate in the South American jungle; in "The Hours after Noon" a child molester is driven by a fellow European into the Moroccan hills, where his fate (a few twists of wire about the neck) is inevitable, once he approaches an Arab child. The last we see of the North American professor of linguistics he has become sheer animal: "Bellowing as loud as he could, he attacked the house and its belongings. Then he attacked the door into the street. . . . He climbed through the opening. . . . and still bellowing and shaking his arms into the air. . . . he began to gallop along the quiet street toward the gateway of the town. A few people looked at him with great curiosity." A soldier shoots at him, idly, and he runs in terror out into the desert, into "the great silence out there beyond the gate." The insight of Conrad's Kurtz—"The horror!" The horror!"—strikes a reader fresh from Bowles's fiction as supremely romantic, even sentimental. Conrad's Africa remains comfortingly European: its terrors can be verbalized.

Even those stories in which nothing explicitly violent occurs, stories

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which would probably not offend the average genteel reader—"The Frozen Fields," "The Time of Friendship"—create an unnerving suspense by virtue of Bowles's masterly craft. He has learned from Hemingway as well as Lawrence; even his descriptions are wonderfully dramatic. Nothing is extraneous, nothing is wasted. If one wants, at times, more humanity—more "consciousness"—surely this is a naive prejudice, a wish that art affirm our human vantage point, as if the brute implacable *otherness* of the natural world were no more threatening than a painted backdrop for an adventure film. Though Bowles's marvelous landscapes call to mind another twentieth-century master of short fiction, D. H. Lawrence, it is misleading to read Bowles in the light of Lawrence. Even in Lawrence's coldest, most "legendary" tales, where landscape overcomes humanity—"The Man Who Loved Islands," "The Woman Who Rode Away"—one confronts and, to some extent, lives within recognizable human beings whose personalities are always convincing; and this is not true in Bowles. Lawrence's people are like us, Bowles's people tend to be our very distant kin, shadowy and remote, unclaimable. One cannot imagine Bowles creating a Constance Chatterley or a Mellors, trembling with apprehension of each other, or a Gerald (of *Women in Love*), so susceptible to erotic passion that he chooses death rather than a life without the woman he desires. Desire in Bowles's fiction—in "Under the Sky," for instance, where a Mexican peasant rapes an American woman—is no more articulated than the emotion of the deranged professor of linguistics. Bowles does not write of sexual love in order to challenge its mythology, like many contemporary writers; he does not write about it at all. His interests lie elsewhere.

This collection, a companion to *The Thicket of Spring* (1972), which brought together four decades of Bowles's poetry, should strengthen Paul Bowles's position in American literature. Austere, remorseless, always beautifully crafted, the best of these stories are bleakly unconsoling as the immense deserts about which Bowles writes with such power, and they linger in the memory—disturbing, vexing—literally for decades. The reader is advised to approach them with caution, however, limiting himself to one or two at a sitting. For these are stories set in an epoch "before God was love," and beside them most acclaimed fiction of our time—brightly and nervously ironic, or dutifully attuned to the latest "moral" problems—seems merely shallow.

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BRUCE MORRISSETTE

Paul and I met at the University of Virginia in the fall of 1928, when we were both seventeen. I had gone up to Charlottesville from Richmond for the weekend to visit Jim Pollard, who introduced me to Paul: "*Nous avons sympathisé aussitôt*," to borrow a phrase from Alain Robbe-Grillet's account of the other lasting friendship I have had with an authentic genius (thirty years later, in 1957). During the fifteen years or so from 1928 to the wartime 1940s, when we more or less dropped out of touch, Paul and I exchanged what now seems a vast quantity of letters, which today I unearthed from their carton, stored in an almost unfindable spot.

Paul had already precociously published a poem "Spire Song" and a prose piece "Entity" (called wrongly "Enlily" in the Table of Contents) in issues 12 and 13 of *transition* (March and Summer 1928), alongside texts by James Joyce, André Breton, Elliot Paul, Man Ray, Paul Eluard, Alan Tate, Pablo Picasso, Archibald MacLeish, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Kay Boyle, and many other then avant-garde authors: an impressive beginning for a sixteen-year-old lad from Queens. But it was as a composer of music that I thought of Paul primarily in those days, and I still strongly regret the lack of attention the musical world accords his first-rate pieces such as his *Sonata for Two Pianos* (brilliantly recorded by Gold and Fizdale). At our first encounter we stole into a vacant University piano room, and Paul played, among other pieces, his *Aubade pour l'avenir*, with its rhythmic dissonances so prophetic of aspects of his later style.

My large box of Bowlesiana has in it some 400 or more items: letters, postcards, photographs, drawings, abstract color paintings, clippings, and flyers. Many of the photographs are "assisted" in the surrealist style of Max Ernst. In another box are many original scores for compositions, some later published and many not. In the 1930s, Paul sent me most of his first musical drafts for which, during his *années de pèlerinage*, I served as a repository.

One large envelope contains nine abstract color paintings (about 6" x 8" each) entitled "Worm in D," and dated 3-28. The Worms (always the one recognizable element) are identified as being in Danger, Delight, Distress, Doubt, Dreams, Disillusionment, Disgrace, Detroit, Death, and Damnation. All are present except "Worm in Detroit," now missing.

As youthful friends will do, Paul and I used a kind of logo to start our letters. "Dear Paul" was replaced by dp (if typing) or by φ (if writing

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by hand). "Dear Bruce" became db and φ. Obviously, the handwritten forms worked out best. The system lasted throughout the years. We also used punctuational mannerisms, like the colon. Since in those days telegrams were cheap and delivery was fast, we used them instead of telephoning. One day I found I could go up Charlottesville for the weekend, and I sent Paul a telegram (which was in capital letters, naturally) reading something like "CAN COME COLON SEE YOU SATURDAY." It happened to be the week that, in his first *fuite rimbaudienne*, Paul chose to disappear to Paris, telling no one. Of course I did not find Paul at home, and returned disappointed to Richmond. Meanwhile, Paul's mother, frantic, came to Charlottesville to search for her missing son, and found my telegram. "COLON" became for her the place name Colón (in Panama), and the officials there were alerted and asked to look for Paul. Years later, when I was with Paul and his mother on Majorca, Mrs. Bowles herself told me the story. She was now able to laugh about it, but it had caused much confusion and anxiety until she finally heard from Paul in Paris.

There are many fascinating aspects to these letters, such as the accounts written in the early 1930s of events and personalities described by Paul thirty years later, in his 1972 autobiography *Without Stopping*. One could do an analytical stylistic study, for example, comparing the account in Paul's June 1931 letter describing his visit to the Dada artist Kurt Schwitter's apartment and its adjacent Merz-Bau museum of fantastic and banal objects, with the almost identical account on pages 114–15 of *Without Stopping*. Total recall, with subtle variations.

Finally, those interested in Paul's personality may be amused to know that this fastidious man, who rigorously avoids all obscenities and coarse talk, was nevertheless fond of singing, in a popular tango rhythm, a bawdy French music hall ditty which ran:

Je ne suis pas curieux  
 Mais je voudrais bien savoir  
 Pourquoi les femmes blondes  
 On les poils du cul noirs,  
 Et pourquoi les nègresses  
 De quatre-vingt-dix ans  
 S'arrachent les poils des fesses  
 Pour faire des brosses à dents!

dp and φ, à travers les années, je te salue!

Traistly,  
 Bruce

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JOHN BERNARD MYERS

In October 1944 I arrived in New York to become the managing editor of *View*. Edited by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, *View* was a journal devoted to serious art and literature, American and European. Many of its contributors were in exile because of the German invasion of France. There had been an extraordinary influx of intellectuals and artists who sequestered themselves in New York. It was surely their presence that initiated the centrality of Manhattan as the art center of the Western world. The surrealists and the neoromantics found havens in Fifty-seventh Street and the Museum of Modern Art. *View* was a voice for many of these energetic artists and poets; it reflected the influence of André Breton and his followers, as well as the elegant romanticism of Tchelitchew, Bérard, Berman, and Léonid. Their influence on subsequent developments in American painting was permeative and lasting.

The surrealists had a wide variety of interests, anthropology being one that fascinated all of them. Claude Levi-Strauss was broadcasting, along with Breton, over Radio Free Europe, and their concern with primitive culture was an added stimulus. Max Ernst was enchanted by the Katchine dolls of the Pueblos and Kurt Seligmann by the totem poles of the northwest coast Indians. There was a new wave of interest among museums and collectors in African and Oceanic sculpture and artifacts.

The polymath Paul Bowles, like his many surrealist friends, had long been interested in primitive cultures. Although he was not a bona fide member of Breton's circle, he had already demonstrated his closeness to their aesthetic libertarianism with his brilliant translation of Giorgio di Chirico's bizarre novel *Hebdemeros*. But Bowles's flair for writing and languages was evident even when he was a child. His story *Bluey*, written when he was eight or nine years old (published in *View*) is a delight. His translations of French, Spanish, and Arabic texts are smooth and precise. He seems to have read everything in the literature of the fantastic: Lautréamont, Jarry, Rousell, and, of course, many of the surrealist poets. Bowles was the perfect person to edit a whole issue of *View* devoted to tropical America. He had been collecting all sorts of material during his travels through South and Central America and the Caribbean.

The issue avoids both politics and journalism. It attempts to capture "the tragic, ludicrous, violent, touching spectacle of a whole vast region still alive and kicking as here it welcomes, there it resists the

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spread of so-called civilization." Rereading Bowles's anthology of words and pictures as it was put together in 1945 is a poignant reminder of cultures and civilizations that have totally disappeared.

Tropical America demonstrated to what extent Bowles was drawn to the magical and supernatural, and the strangeness to be found among other peoples, other ways of life different from our own: themes that run throughout his work both musical and literary. In his editor's note he writes of "the existence, alongside the Church, of a widespread system of practical magic; it is an important phenomenon; it keeps the minds of its participants in a healthy state of personalized anarchy,—and individual practitioners, rather than an international religious syndicate, gain the monetary reward." Bowles presents a dazzling assemblage of words and images, texts both ancient and primitive. There are stories, votary-collages, a suffusion of pagan and Christian incantations, rituals, horseplay.

It was not, however, as a man of letters that I first became aware of Paul Bowles. I had already heard a performance of his two-piano Sonata played by Robert Fizdale and Arthur Gold at Town Hall. Peggy Guggenheim had put out a record album of his Mexican dances which she sold in her gallery Art of This Century. There was his opera *Denmark Vesey* performed at the Museum of Modern Art, which told the story of a black man who organized an ill-fated revolt against slavery in Charleston in 1822. There was something wonderfully unspoiled and fresh about these compositions, perhaps because he had studied with Virgil Thompson and Aaron Copland instead of at the obligatory finishing school of Nadia Boulanger.

During the summer of 1945 the coffers were empty at *View* and I decided to get some jobs performing in night clubs. Paul Goodman and Ned Rorem wrote some songs for me; I did some turns with puppets with additional short pantomime—monologues. (I worked in Village hangouts that put up with my *bizarceries*. One of my songs was called "I'm Not Jail-bait Any More.") But my ambition was larger. I asked Charles Henri Ford and Jane Bowles if they would write two little plays, each about eight minutes long. They did. One was called *A Sentimental Playlet* (by Ford); the other, *A Quarreling Pair* (by Jane). (One can read this latter play in the collected work of Jane Bowles; it's very funny and touching.) I asked the marvelous surrealist painter Kurt Seligmann for help, and he agreed to design and make the puppets as well as a decorated screen over the top of which the actors would perform. I needed music and asked Paul Bowles if he would write four songs, two for each play. Paul loved puppets and patiently sat with me at his piano—

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teaching me the music (I can't read notes) and how to project the verses. When the production was ready, I presented it at Spivy's Roof, a chic nightclub on the corner of Fifty-seventh Street and Lexington Avenue. The theater lyricist John LaTouche arranged the engagement, and the opening night was purest, posh uptown Bohemian.

Paul Bowles didn't like my performance, and my puppet show was too peculiar for Spivy's regular clientele. Truth to tell I was not skillful enough to project such witty and subtle material with the necessary panache. Years later, however, *A Quarreling Pair* was gloriously realized by the puppet repertory theater of Frank Peachke and Bill Murdock. The Seligmann puppets were eventually wrapped in tissue and preserved in a box. They became beautiful works of art instead of actors; I brought them to the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, where they are much happier as part of the museum's great collection of puppets and marionettes.

Paul, however, was not done with composing for poets. In 1954 Fizdale and Gold commissioned him to set to music James Schuyler's *A Picnic Cantata*. (I had published some of Schuyler's poetry in one of my small publishing ventures—Tibor de Nagy editions.) The performance and the later record album was beguiling and very beautiful. By the end of the 1950s Paul stopped being a composer; it was impossible for him to make a living writing music. He was too much of a dandy to live on handouts even from so generous a patroness as Libby Holman.

Both the Bowleses left New York and I never saw them again. They had moved permanently to Morocco. A few years ago while stopping over in Tangier, I was tempted to call on Paul (Jane had died)—but I found I was suddenly embarrassed. He would remember how, from his musical viewpoint, I had botched his songs. And did I really want to disturb his cozy life, serenely happy smoking his kif and drinking mint tea?

## RUTH FAINLIGHT

Friends from the old days in Spain had moved to Tangier. Their enthusiastic letters, and the general tendency of water and human beings to take the line of least resistance, made it our destination when Alan Sillitoe and I decided to get out of London for a few months late in 1960. The fact that Paul Bowles, whose work I admired, lived there, —was important also. I had not yet read any of Jane's writing. We began

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to look for an apartment and Jane (we had been introduced to the Bowleses and liked each other immediately) mentioned that there was an empty one on the top floor of their building, Inmueble Itesa.

She had one of the standard three rooms etc. apartments, Paul a smaller "garçonnière" on the floor below. He wrote, slept, and saw his friends there. Jane's place was for the domestic, married, shared part of his life, where his birds shrieked from their cages on the shuttered terrace and complicated and delicious meals were cooked by Jane's entourage for him and anyone else who happened to be there—which sometimes included the two of us. Afterward, we would lean back against the low cushions and talk about life and art, books and writing, ourselves. Paul told stories of his travels across the Atlas Mountains into the south, and showed us photos of places he had visited there. At that time he was writing travel pieces for magazines, and recording the indigenous music for the Library of Congress. I was fascinated by the rhythms and sounds of unfamiliar instrumental combinations, and the hoarse, powerful voices. Neighborly daytime visits or occasional excursions—to Madame Porte's tearoom, to a special shop in the Socco—were feminine activities for Jane and me and her Spanish and Moroccan companions. When we went back to England four months later, I felt that we had established the basis of an enduring friendship.

It was about a year before we returned. After a slow drive through France and Spain, which included forty-eight hours in an Andalusian village having the clutch of our car rebuilt, we arrived one morning in early June with our ten-week-old son.

In view of such altered circumstances, Paul had booked us a room in advance, but the Hotel Atlas did not have a dining room. None of us had any idea of the necessary practicalities such a young child involved. I don't think I had held a baby in my arms before having my own. Tennessee Williams was in Tangier then, and he and his friend Fred were also frequent dinner guests. I remember him taking David onto his lap one evening. They stared at each other for a long time, equally fascinated and content. Paul and Jane seemed as fondly intrigued by the relationship between me and my son as I was by that between the two of them. As long as he did not scream, a baby was as interesting as a bird or any other exotic creature. I could not have hit upon a more unusual role than this of young mother. Jane's Berber friend Sherifa gave me the new name, "Baby."

We wanted to get out of the hotel, and Paul suggested a house belonging to an American woman he knew. It was up the Camino del Monte, on the edge of and above the town. Farther along the winding

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road was the hotel where he and Jane had lived years before. The house was exactly right, with a high-ceilinged living room full of orange and crimson cushions and rugs, glorious pottery, and soft camel-hair blankets on the beds. From the wide stone terrace we looked across the Straits of Gibraltar to Tarifa, the most southerly town in Europe. We were installed by the end of the month.

The pace of meetings slowed now that we were fellow residents. David began to occupy more of my time and attention, and motherhood seemed to make me write more. They came up the hill to see how we had settled in, and when I went down I would stop at the Itesa to visit Jane, and Paul as well, if he was there. But over the months there were opportunities to talk about work, and a few special evenings to see and hear new things Paul had found. We met some of the writers, mostly Americans, who had come to Tangier especially because of him. After a quarter of a century it is the sense of ease and affinity I recall best, more than specific topics or incidents.

We thought that we were going to stay in Tangier for a long time. Between our two visits, the city charter terminated. There were many empty houses and apartments left by people who had moved on. Jane came with me on several occasions to look at some place or other where I imagined that David and Alan and I might live after our present lease ended. But then circumstances called us back to England, and one day in the spring of 1963, she and Paul came to the harbor to say good-bye as we embarked. That was the last time we saw them, though through all that has happened since, Paul and I have continued to write to each other.

## JAMES PURDY

Carl Van Vechten telephoned me one evening in the late 1950s to say that Paul Bowles was in town and would like to meet me. Mr. Bowles, Van Vechten went on, was an admirer of my stories "63: Dream Palace."

Mr. Van Vechten's elegant suite of rooms on Central Park West was as exotic and isolated from that time period as Mr. Bowles's remarkable stories and novels.

That evening I found Mr. Bowles a very quiet, extremely receptive man, and though deep and inscrutable, kind and amicable.

By the time Paul Bowles and I met, Carl Van Vechten no longer wrote novels but devoted himself to photography, at which he was a

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master. He had especially distinguished himself by his photographs of famous black celebrities. That evening he took several photos of Mr. Bowles and me.

Since that first meeting, I have corresponded with Paul Bowles and he with me rather regularly. Sometimes our letters miscarry for a time, but then eventually they arrive at their destination, though perhaps four months late. Whether the delays are due to the Moroccan postal authorities or the U. S. Postal Service, we have never been able to determine.

Paul Bowles's stories and novels—and his stunning musical compositions—have survived all the many changes of fashion and the vicissitudes of time. Writers more acclaimed by press and public than he have gone down to permanent oblivion, while his name kindles more and more lasting recognition.

I have always regretted he and I live so far away from one another. I think we could have had wonderful talks. Meanwhile I will always see him in my mind as sitting among the gallery of stars in Carl Van Vechten's photography studio.

## JOHN O'BRIEN

For better and for worse, an editor/publisher knows a writer from a perspective that is different, I think, from anyone else's. One would not publish his work—and in my case, devote an issue of his magazine to him—if he did not already believe in the importance of the writer's art. That being assumed, one then thinks of the writer in terms of his reliability, the condition of the manuscripts he submits, whether he regularly has complaints and makes demands, whether—as is more rare than one would like to be the case—he sees the editor more as a collaborator than as the enemy. Strangely, the author's work takes a secondary place in the editor's mind to what it was like dealing with the author. I wish that the situation were otherwise for an editor—and perhaps it is for some—but the reality of publishing requires coming to terms with personalities and histories. A friend of mine recently brought a novelist to campus to give a reading, after which the author told off my friend because he had not introduced him as the "best living writer." I doubt that this remark was in fact directed at my friend, but rather at thousands of slights and disappointments that this novelist had experienced or thought that he had experienced for many years, now

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seeking out the occasions for further insults so that he might duly respond to them.

My rather limited experience in dealing with Paul Bowles has been cordial but marked by my having to face his years of frustrations and accumulated prejudices. He does not like criticism, either writing it or having it written about him. When I asked him, now over six years ago, to write a short piece on another author, he politely declined by way of saying that he did not feel well-enough read on the author to have anything worthwhile to say. Then when I was planning an issue devoted to his work, I sought his suggestions for possible contributors (i.e., critics who might currently be doing work on him or, perhaps, fellow novelists who would be inclined to write); I also asked him if he would submit a piece of criticism, as well as a short story or a selection from a work in progress. This time he was a bit more to the point, while still maintaining a cordiality that was at odds with his unhelpfulness: 1) he did not write criticism; 2) he knew of no one who was interested in writing about his work; and 3) he did not have any fiction that I could use in the issue. For several months after his issue had come out, I received letters from people who expressed their regret at not knowing that I had been doing a Paul Bowles issue because they had been writing on him (and he knew that they had been writing!), one of whom had been conducting an interview with him during the same week that I had contacted Bowles for his suggestions. Bowles is a writer who is wary of his critics, one who, I suspect, was not inclined to have me do this issue from the start, but who was too gracious to strongly discourage me from pursuing it, though of course he would not help in its undertaking.

After the issue appeared, he took exception to an article that Paul Metcalf had written about him, an exception that developed into a series of letters between Richard Peabody, Bowles, and Metcalf, letters which I later published. I heard directly from Bowles about the issue only once, which was a request for and a complaint that he had not been sent a copy of "his" issue. My knowledge about his displeasure with Metcalf's article came through Peabody's letters to me. That was the last that I had to do with Paul Bowles until I was planning a special fiction issue to which I wanted him to contribute. I wrote and he promptly responded with a piece. A few months later, I sent him galleys, which he meticulously went through, noting his corrections. A few days after his corrections arrived, he wrote again requesting that I make a few more changes and thanked me for my patience. Bowles is a writer who likes his fiction to be published, and one who takes absolute care about it.

That Bowles has a readerly following is apparent. Aside from the

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issue that I published on William Burroughs, I received more requests from individuals for the Bowles issue than for any other. If Bowles himself does not like criticism about him, his secret band of readers do. I do not know with complete certainty why so little criticism has been written about Bowles, though I can imagine a crew of graduate students and would-be critics from over the years giving up their efforts in the face of the author's reluctance to have such criticism written. We live in a time when a novelist must be an active participant in the creation of criticism about him—Pynchon to the contrary—if the writer is to have thinking develop around his work. Bowles, like Bartleby, prefers not to.

JOHN KUEHL

Though Paul Bowles is also a distinguished composer/musicologist, poet/translator, and essayist/autobiographer, we know him as the author of four novels and four collections of stories. He has always produced splendid work, but if Bowles were regarded for only *The Sheltering Sky*, his reputation among post-World War II American fictionists would still be secure.

During the previous generation, expatriate artists tended to live in "rational" Europe, but descendants Bowles and Burroughs, following Hemingway and Lawrence, chose "primitive" locales, particularly Tangier, Morocco. There the two friends became prophets, Burroughs anticipating apocalypse and Bowles terrorism, the twin results of the failure of the Anglo-Saxon mind to comprehend alien cultures.

Both explore the irrational world of dreams, drugs, and deviations, but whereas this world dictates form in Burroughs, Bowles remains a classical writer. Like John Hawkes, who also renders "poetic" prose, he exercises strict conscious control over expressionistic landscapes, aberrant psychologies, and grotesque situations. What Hawkes said in a 1971 interview characterizes Bowles too: "There's nothing murky or dreamlike about my fiction, and it's not a matter of unconscious flow or automatic writing. I'm interested in highly shaped and perfected works of art."

Why, then, did so many decades elapse between the publication of a masterwork such as *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and the Fall 1982 issue of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* devoted to him and Coleman Dowell? The answer is clear, if a recent statistic claiming only every other American reads one book per year can be trusted. Yet Bowles, if not Dowell, has fared better than Herman Melville, whose *Moby-Dick* (1855)

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was ignored until the 1920s, and William Gaddis, whose *The Recognitions* remains obscure. For that matter, how many readers out there have opened a novel by Joseph McElroy or Alexander Theroux?

## GORDON LISH

I was never in the company of Paul Bowles. I know that we exchanged a few letters. No remembering what was their substance. I expect I had written to him to offer my salute and that he had replied in courteous acknowledgment. When I was doing the *Chrysalis Review*, I asked Bowles for work. He sent work. When I was doing *Genesis West*, I asked Bowles for work. He sent work. I knew that he would. He was in Tangier or Tangiers or Tanger or however the hell you are supposed to get the name of that place down on paper and I, of course, was somewhere an ocean or two away. But I tell you I could smell the decency and generosity in that man over across all that busy water. Paul Bowles? He mattered to me when I was learning how to read—but also when I was learning how to be. I am still learning in both departments—and so my debt to Paul Bowles keeps getting larger.

## JOHN LEHMANN

I can well remember the excitement I felt when a New York agent said to me, "I have here a ms. I can't find a publisher for. It occurs to me you might be the man to do something with it." And he handed me the typescript of *The Sheltering Sky* by Paul Bowles. He was not unknown to me: I had read several of his short stories in English and American magazines, and had been struck by the carefully wrought style, the vividness of the imagery, and the angle of vision—not for the squeamish. If this novel showed the same qualities, it was definitely a book for John Lehmann's list. . . . I finished it that night, and knew I had got hold of something of the utmost originality. I just couldn't understand why no other publisher on either side of the Atlantic (for I was offered World rights) had seen what I saw in it. I had a great success with it, but not a popular success: it was too bizarre for the ordinary novel-reader's taste. I followed it with a selection of Bowles's short stories, which I called *A Little Stone*, and then the second novel *Let It Come Down*, which I have described as "a descent into hell by a master of infernal landscape, with a dry, macabre humour running through it that seemed to me an important gain over his first novel." I have always

## ASPECTS OF SELF: A BOWLES COLLAGE

been sad that the demise of my publishing firm prevented me from carrying on as Paul Bowles's English publisher.

## IRVING MALIN

Although Paul Bowles does not take these letters as serious writing, they are valuable for several reasons. Bowles recognizes that criticism—especially American criticism—often neglects the word for the sermon or propaganda. He hopes that the essays in the book will try to capture the elusive *text*. I'm not completely sure that they do; they are attracted to the themes of deception and criminality; often they fit his texts into sociological and psychological patterns.

Bowles seems to remember everything. He'll describe an evening in 1919 in which he walked through foggy Forest Hills or Djuna Barnes's nasty comments. Once we recognize that he is precise in his renditions, we can see that he never loses material, that he redeems the past.

I notice a contradiction in these letters. Although Bowles claims that he is far removed from the literary life, he eagerly wants to know about *Dutch Schultz* (Burroughs' wonderful novel/screenplay) or Andrew Field's odd biography of Djuna.

I have suggested that Bowles is in the gothic tradition of our literature. His remarks about Aiken's fiction establish the fact that he is attracted to the dream-life, the fantastic. Once we critics trace Bowles's relationship to Poe—a key influence (for Aiken as well), we will see that Bowles notices an odd, gripping reflection in his "cousin, Mr. Poe." (In one of the interesting essays Wayne Pounds stresses the Poe influence.)

I believe that these letters suggest that Bowles is not "severe." He corrects my dates, grammar; but he does so because he hates loose language. I appreciate his comments; they are proper.

These letters are not important in the long run, but they reveal aspects of Bowles (and his critic) which the careful reader will see. I have included them because they are more than gossip. Their twists and turns; their polite corrections and questions—these qualities tell us much about their author.

All of the letters are addressed to Irving Malin and are sent from: 2117 Tanger Socco, Tangier, Morocco.

We have dispensed with the salutation, complimentary close, and signature, and give the date of each letter.

14/xii/82

I have your postcard of December seventh, but am unable to decipher it. You say you are contemplating (I quote): "editing a

## TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

collection on your work." The phraseology leaves much room for doubt. I don't know the expression: a collection on work. Can you explain what is meant? If your card had been typed, I should have assumed that *on* was a typo for *of*, but since it was written by hand, you must have meant *on*, and that is what confuses me.

I keep rereading your sentence, trying to solve its puzzle by using my imagination; the most likely answer I can find is that you mean a collection of critical pieces dealing with my work. It makes sense, as a sentence, but not in its application, since there are practically no such pieces,—at least, not to my knowledge. Nevertheless, you must know what you mean, so all you need do is tell me. I'm not eager to be interviewed; that much I can tell you. Most of those who come here to interview me are not very good at it: their questions don't spring from familiarity with my work, and consequently they glance off, rather than hitting where they should. And clearly it's impossible for the interviewee to direct the course of the questioning.

In any case, I hope to hear from you.

4/1/83

Thank you for explaining what you had meant in your earlier missive. I don't know how easy it would be to gather a corpus of intelligent critical writing (on anything, not to speak of my work, which in the United States hasn't attracted much perceptive criticism).

The principal objection I have to most American critics is that they focus all their attention on the subject-matter, and think it necessary to analyze its meaning. If they would pay attention instead to the writing itself, taking the subject-matter for granted, I think that what they have to say would prove to be more valuable. They seem to believe that the tale itself is something apart from its language, that the language is a wrapping, rather than the root and trunk of the material. In England they've done better occasionally.

Since I don't know whom you plan to contact in order to get your essays, I can't say very much about the project. Once you have a body of work on hand, I might be able to fashion something which would accompany it successfully.

I haven't seen your two short pieces on me. Where did they appear? Here in Morocco I'm isolated from all literary life.

24/1/83

It's fairly useless to tell me about the various reviews and articles having to do with my work, since I have no way of seeing them. Things

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which are sent out don't necessarily reach their destination nowadays.  
 (Assuming, of course, that they were ever sent out, which is questionable.)

Forest Hills I remember very well from the early Twenties. At that time I lived in Jamaica, and we used to go to eat at the Forest Hills Inn, which was the social center of the place. It was entirely a replica of an English village—or, at least, meant to be. (My memories date even from 1919, when one evening while my parents and their friends were sitting at the Inn bewailing the passage of the Volstead Act I went out for a walk in a thick fog, and found the village satisfactorily mysterious. Jamaica never looked like that!)

Glad you reread *Up*, and sorry I can't discuss any of your critical works. Maybe some day someone will see that I get a copy of this *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, where there seem to be several critical pieces on my writing.

8/ii/83

I have your aerogramme and your postcard, of the second February and the thirty-first January respectively. You say you've promised *Ontario Review* to provide a manuscript within "30 months"; at the same time you speak of 1984 publication. Something's amiss.

It strikes me that you'll have to pull your contributors out of an opera hat along with some rabbits and pigeons. I doubt very much that Williams, Vidal, or Purdy would consider participation. Was it in order to find contributors that you made contact with John Martin and Jeffrey Miller? I wish I could help you (perhaps you need no help; I hope not) but I know no critics.

I note that in two of your missives you've mentioned Richmond Hill as though it meant something special to me. This time you followed the words with the title of my autobiography in parentheses. But I never lived there or had anything to do with the place. I was born in Jamaica and spent my childhood there. Fortunately in the 'Teens and Twenties it was on the edge of the country, and there were woods all around. Rather early in the Twenties, now that I think of it, the country began to disappear as more houses were built. Are there no more tennis matches in Forest Hills?

I haven't read much of Aiken. I remember *Blue Voyage*, which I read in high school when it came out, and a chilling tale, *Mr. Arcularis* (one of the best short stories by an American), as well as another fine story (although a bit less fine) called *Silent Snow, Secret Snow*. So I hope *Southern Quarterly* sends your piece, or your issue. (You ask if you should

## TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

include "tributes." I don't understand what you mean by the word. Tributes or attacks, they will, I hope, be intelligent and well written.)

I think I should tell you now, if I haven't already (and I don't think I have) that by far the most interesting critical appraisal of my work has been provided by Wayne Pounds. His Master's Thesis (unpublished) *Paul Bowles and the Geography of the Inner Nature: Some Psychological Correlatives of Landscape*, is wonderfully perspicacious. There are a few errors, but in general the work burgeons with examples of sharp insight. The only published essay of his I know of was published in 1981 in the *Revue belge de philologie*, 59 (1981–83) in English under the title *Paul Bowles and The Delicate Prey: The Psychology of Predation*. This piece is also very good. In case you would like to get in touch with him, I can give you the last address of his to arrive here. . . . It suddenly occurred to me as I read your most recent missive that you might well be pleased to know of his existence.

7/iii/83

No, the house where I lived in Jamaica was not particularly near Richmond Hill. It was at the top of "the Hill," on the site of the Battle of Long Island. To drive into Manhattan you had to go to Hillside Avenue, follow it westward to Queens Boulevard, turn right on that, and continue through Kew Gardens, Forest Hills, and eventually Long Island City to the Queensborough Bridge. (Neither the name Jahn nor the Interborough Parkway means anything to me. They must have been items which were added later.) The word Parkway applied only to the Motor Parkway. There were the Jericho Turnpike and the Merrick Road, going east and southeast respectively. . . . I can't advise you on the solicitation of praise. It seems, on the face of it, a bit meretricious. I suppose the decision to beg for eulogies might depend on the rest of the material.

17/iv/83

Of James Merrill I've read only a small amount: the things we've published in *Antaeus* over the years (whose proofs I always corrected) and something called *Water Street* which he sent me years ago. I'm not sure I see the analogy with Gaddis. (*The Recognitions* seemed to me to contain a good deal of unnecessary material, but it's a long time since I read it; perhaps I should look at it again. I remember chafing under a load of verbiage, although it was perfectly readable.)

I've never received what you call the "Aiken issue." Naturally I'm hoping to see it one day. Things have a way, however, of disappearing

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between the States and Morocco. The editor of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* had to send me three copies of the issue on me and Dowell before I finally saw it.

Perhaps Pounds and Stewart feel that they've done enough writing about me; I shouldn't blame them if they did. Miller, as far as I know, doesn't write criticism in any case, and he has enough to do finishing his bibliography without being forced to "think." He's bringing out a collection of translations I've done over the years, called *She Woke Me Up So I Killed Her*.

As you can imagine, I'm not "editing" or "consulting" in my relationship with the *Threepenny Review*. It's a good magazine, so I agreed to having my name added to the masthead.

I hope you continue to have good luck in your search for writers to contribute to your . . . volume.

28/v/83

Thanks for the Fitzgerald article; I read it with interest, although I don't know the story. It sounds better than the stories of Fitzgerald I've read (whose titles I don't even recall, save *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*, which of course is a well-nigh unforgettable title. But I confess that I don't remember the story itself).

I hope that someone who contributes to your . . . book will write about *Midnight Mass*. The book received no notice whatever when it appeared, perhaps because it came directly on the heels of the *Collected Stories*. Everything else has been examined and judged, but not *Midnight Mass*.

The other day I noticed a reference in a Dutch book to a piece you apparently wrote several years ago on my tale *The Frozen Fields*, in which you called Donald a "displaced person." In what organ was this piece published? Do you remember?

The Dutch Schultz book is one of the Burroughs items I've missed. People tell me it's good. Is it a film-script?

13/vi/83

On page 235 of Hans Berten's *The Fiction of Paul Bowles* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1979), I find: "Irving Malin is right in calling Donald 'a displaced person.'" A footnote attributes this remark to an article of yours on *The Time of Friendship*, from *Studies in Short Fiction*, 5, No. 3 (1968), p. 312.

What Donald is doing with Slimane and Fräulein Windling I don't

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know. Perhaps some sort of analogy was being drawn. Or is Bertens mistaken?

Re your P.S., partially covered by postmarks and thus not fully legible, I suppose everyone in the United States apart from the Indians is a displaced person.\* (There shouldn't be such a category, since we all inhabit the same planet, and thus can't be displaced.)

I'm intrigued as to why you paste one-dollar stamps all over your postcard. Like using greenbacks to roll joints in. Or Barbara Hutton coming out of a native toilet while traveling in Morocco, and confiding to Princess Mdvani that there was no toilet paper and that she'd had to use all the American Express checks she had in her purse.

Anyway, it's Saharan heat here at the moment. Unseasonable. We'll probably have a cold summer as usual. The temperature seldom goes above 75 degrees fahrenheit.

\* (and even they are displaced Asiatics.)

30/vi/83

Your three postcards (or I believe they're called "postal cards" when issued by the government) arrived together, a surprising feat.

I haven't seen *Djuna*; is it an interesting biography? I knew her really only for a few months, back in 1932, when she was here in Tangier, and never saw her again after that. (I'd met her in Paris briefly before 1932.) We didn't know each other. I very seldom talked, as I recall, in her presence, being content to listen to her monologues, which were always amusing. (Her remarks about people were radical, drastic, pitiless.)

Certainly I don't make carbons of anything—not even stories. I have a dislike of trying to fit the flimsy sheets together so they'll go into the typewriter properly, so I never use carbons. Nor will I have a telephone. We have these little phobias in common. As to driving, I haven't sat behind a steering wheel since 1957. I used to have a beautiful Jaguar convertible, all mahogany and Morocco leather inside, and it practically drove itself, so I did drive that around Morocco and Spain, and even France on one occasion. I wouldn't try to drive now under any circumstances, of course.

*Points in Time* can scarcely be called a book, but I wanted to write it, and it gave me a certain satisfaction.

I never heard the word "displaced" as referring to individuals until some time after World War II. I remember that Toklas remarked: Jane Bowles is strange as an American but not as an Oriental—especially an Oriental D.P.

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16/vii/83

On your card of June sixteenth you refer to *Points in Time* as a "fascinating mix." I assume "mix" means mixture. I suppose it could be called that: a mixture of history and poetry. And by making clear the "obsessive points of the fiction," you mean that I chose to write about the historical events that interested me, which of course I did.

Yesterday I received three postals, marked I, III, and IV respectively. A fairly typical average: seventy-five percent. In each post I receive chiding letters asking why I haven't responded to missives sent some time back. It's simple: I've never received them. C'est à déespérer.

You're wrong about my reaction to the use of initials. I've used them in salutations to friends for fifty years or more. I wonder why you imagined I'd find them "not nice." You must think of me as severe and somewhat prissy. Calling people whom I've never met, or whom I've just met, by their first names, however, rubs me the wrong way, simply because it wasn't done when I was young, and is a matter of ingrained etiquette, like rising when a female comes into the room. (A habit hard to break.)

I think the letter-number correspondences exist only in Hebrew. I'm not an Arabic scholar. Among the Souafa there may be an esoteric relationship known only to the initiates.

Jeffrey Miller will publish a collection of my translations not yet published in book form. I don't know the target date; Cadmus Press is slow, but makes attractive books. This one is called *She Woke Me Up So I Killed Her*, the title of one of the pieces, by Jules Ferry. I'm eager to see the book. (At the moment in the midst of classes.)

31/viii/83

If my reply to your most recent message seems dilatory, you can blame the presence of the students from New York. Now they've departed, and the quiet month of September stretches ahead.

I heard today from a man who was here some years ago doing a prolonged interview with me. (It must have gone on for three months.) He says he has finished his book, that it contains 320 pages, and that it gives short shrift to "late Bowles," "the Moroccanization of Bowles," and "the Ayatollah Bowles" (whatever that can mean!) . . .

Let me finish this up and send it off. I have thirty or more letters that must be written this weekend. Thus no one of them can be lengthy.

## TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

Your letter, postmarked September 10th, arrived yesterday, which was December 7th. Impossible to guess why it should have taken two months to fly across the Atlantic. I don't think I've received anything from you postdating this missive, which tells about a piece someone has sent you on time in my fiction, and mentioning that your target length for the book has to be a hundred and fifty pages. Is that less or more than you expected to have to furnish?

I've had a television crew (of seven) here for nine days, making an interview. It seemed to me that it could have been done in less time, but perhaps the members of the crew were enjoying being in Tangier; I don't know. It was a good deal of bother, and involved my sitting for hours in uncomfortable out-of-door spots in the driving east wind. Fortunately it's all over now, as of five days ago.

I just thought I'd notify you that your letter had taken its time getting here, but that it had ultimately arrived.

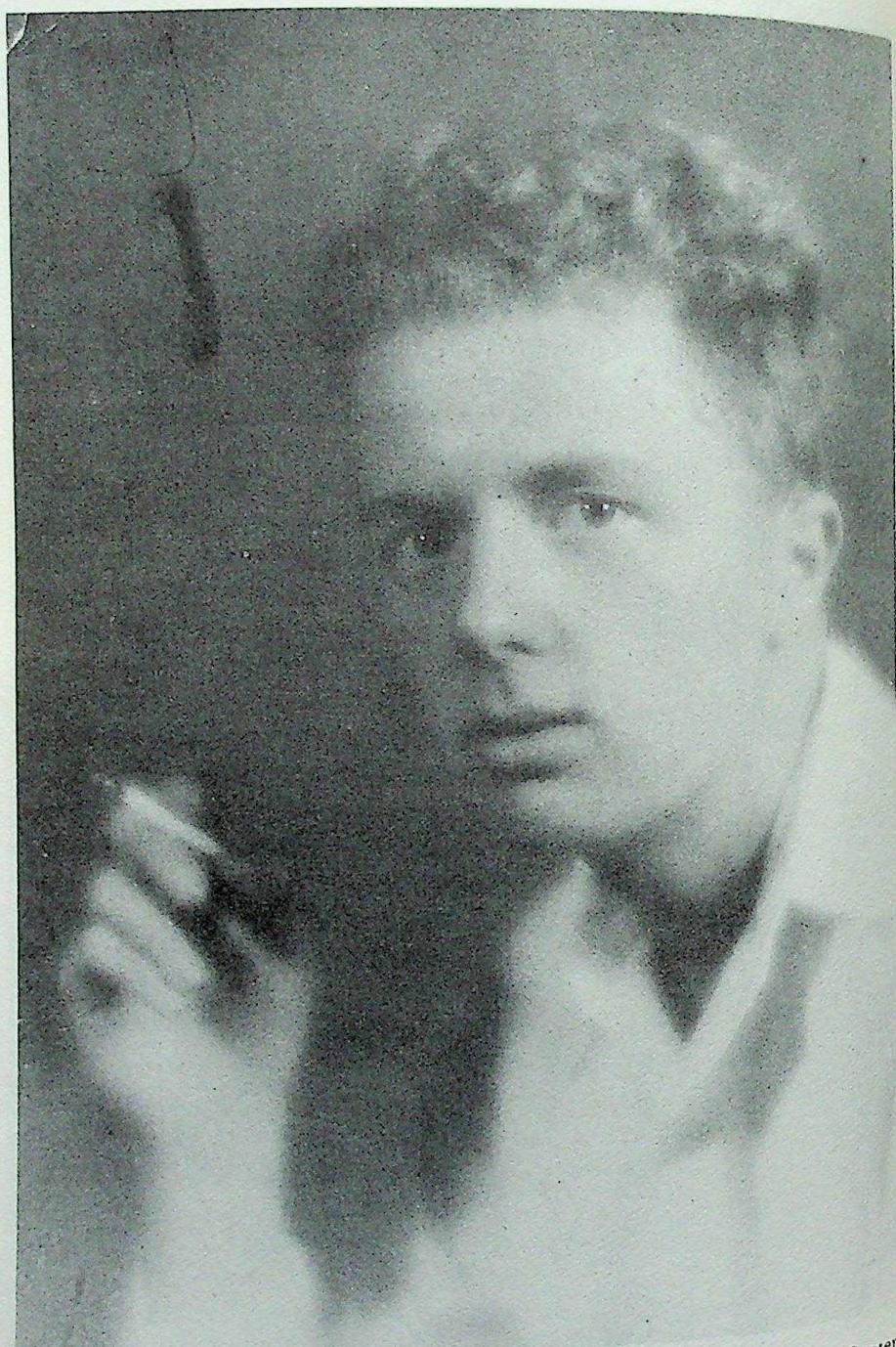
19/xi/84

Thank you for getting in touch with the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*; I hope they send only xeroxes, since they would conceivably be put into an ordinary envelope and sent by air, whereas if the entire magazine is sent I surely shan't see it before spring. . . .

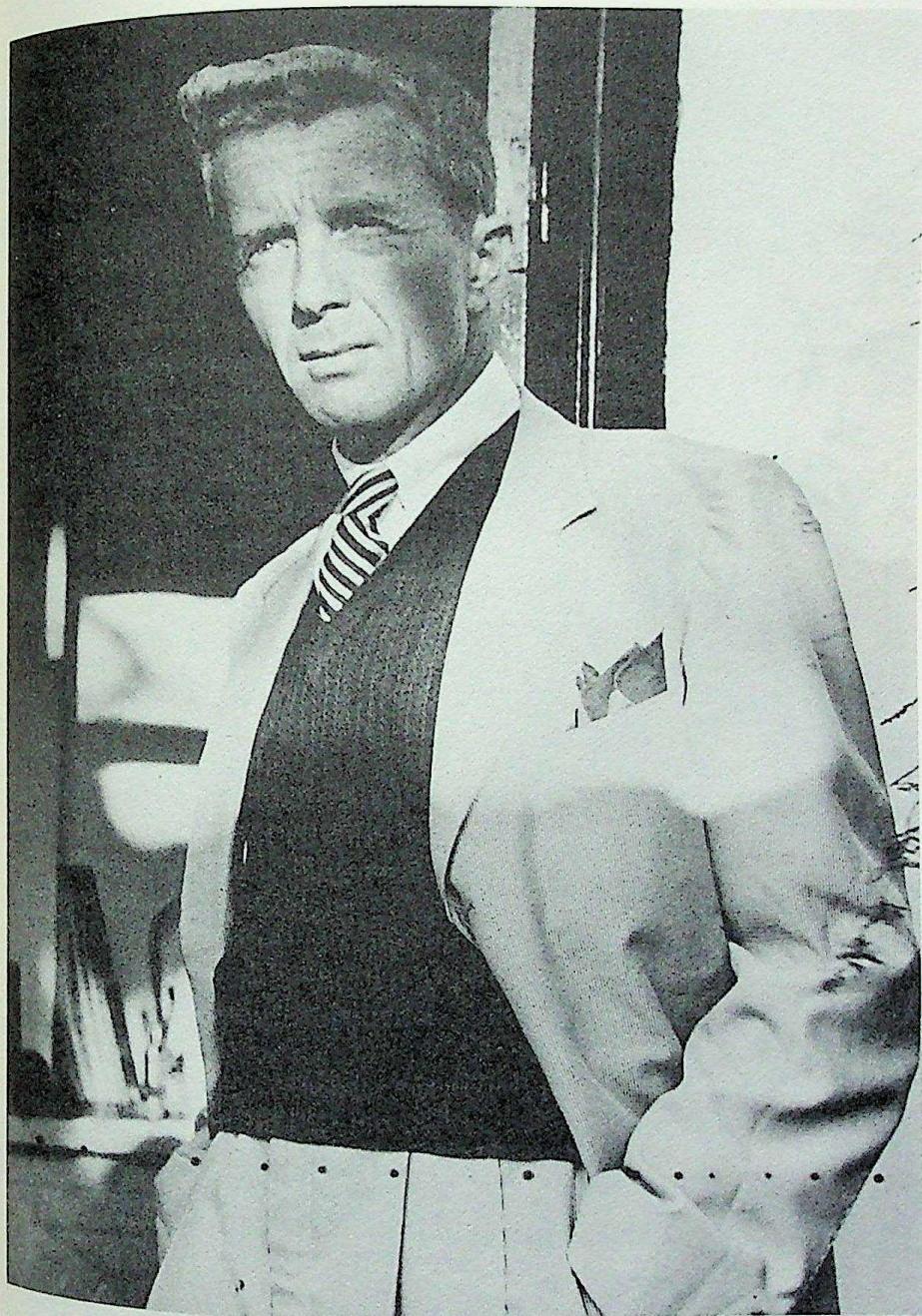
Last night I read *Flaubert's Parrot* (Julian Barnes). I quote the text: "He wanted his prose to be objective, scientific, devoid of any personal presence." Surely even in this age one can still strive for that. It seems to me that it should be easier to achieve in the Twentieth Century than the Nineteenth, but present-day *littérateurs* make it clear that this is not the case. The taped interview is more important and profound than what the writer wrote. Anyway, I'm gratified to see that you agree with me.



Paul Bowles. Photo courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,  
The University of Texas at Austin



Paul Bowles. Photo courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,  
The University of Texas at Austin

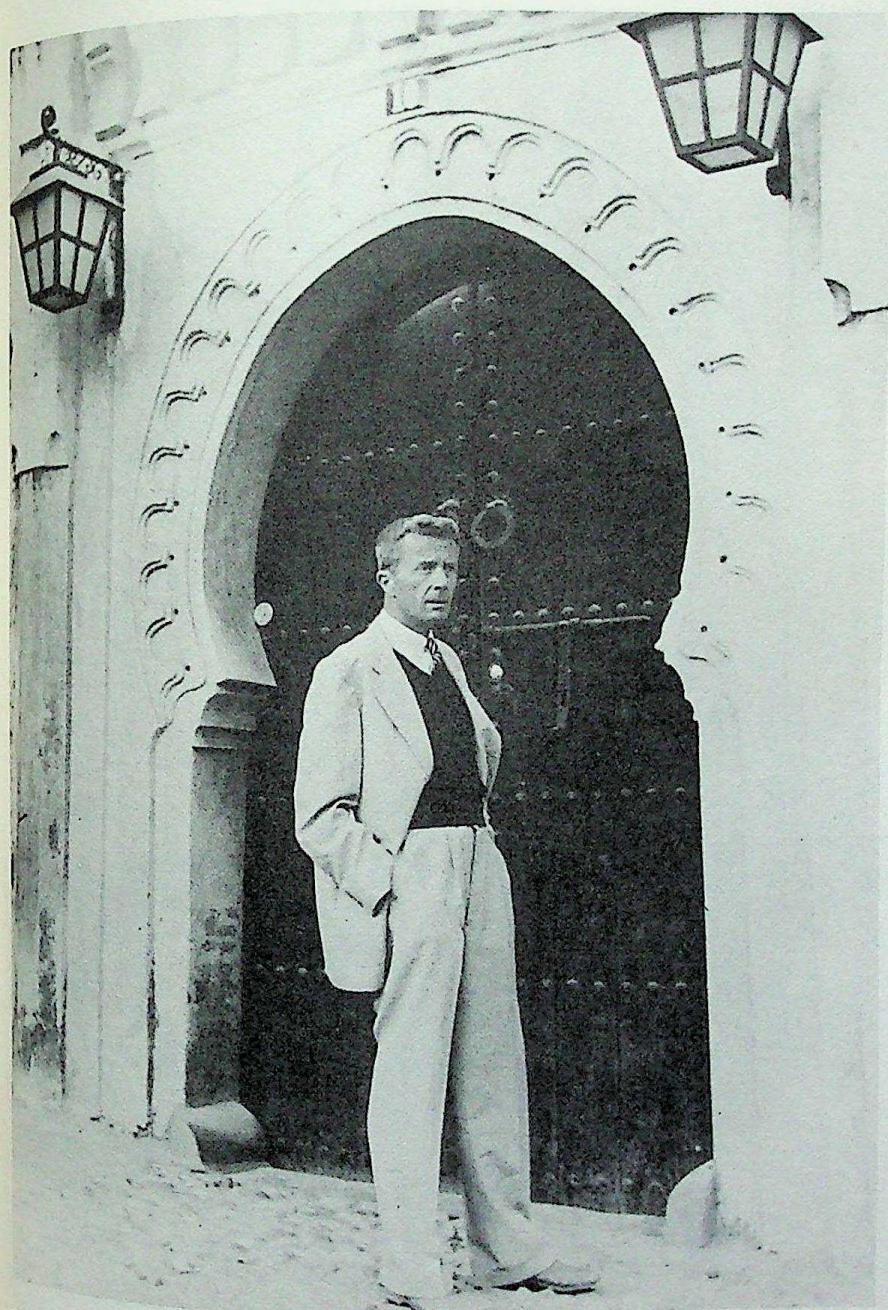


DONALD ANGUS

Paul Bowles. Photo courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,  
The University of Texas at Austin

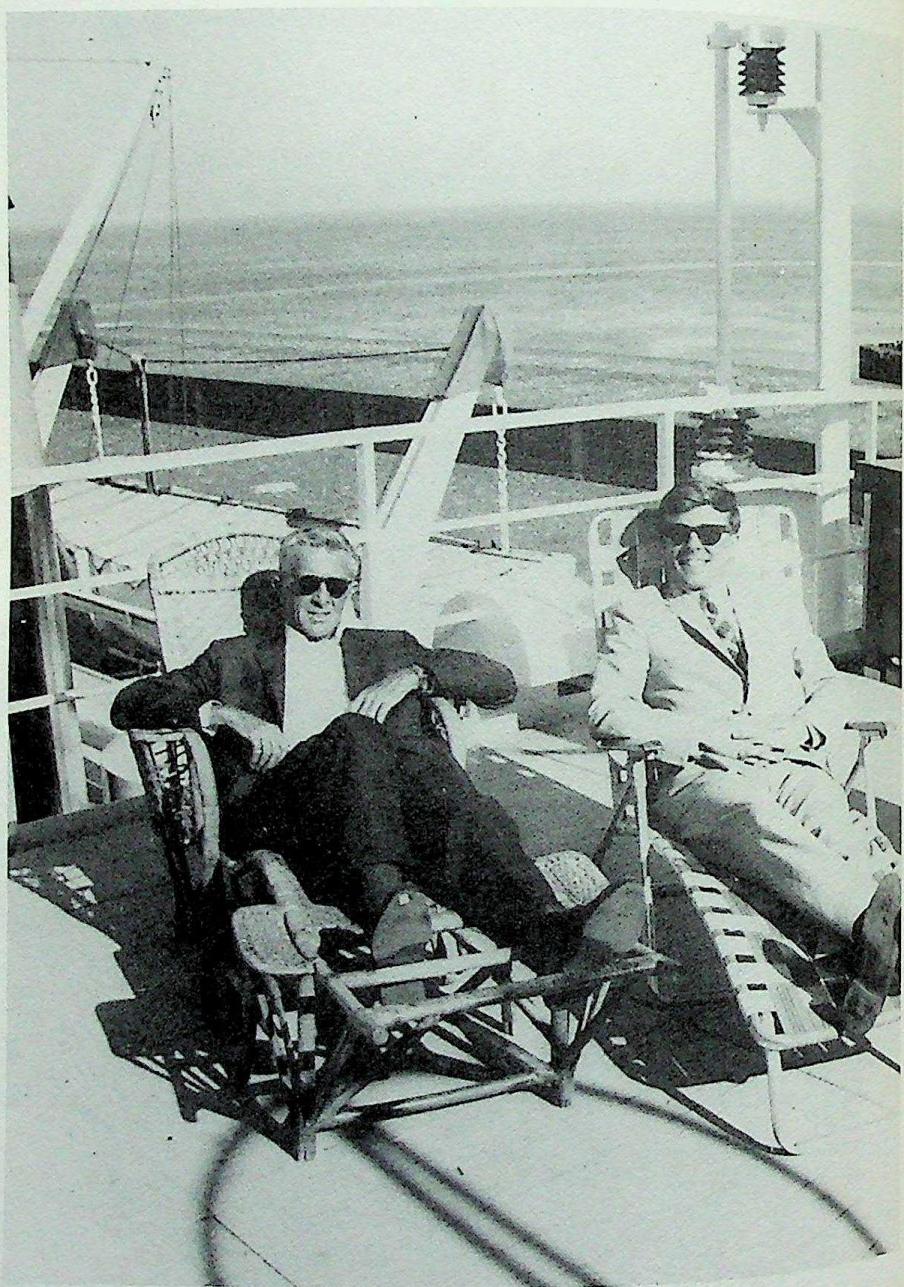


Paul Bowles's apartment building "The Immeuble Itesa"



Paul Bowles. Photo courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center,  
The University of Texas at Austin

DONALD ANGUS



Paul Bowles with Andreas Brown, San Francisco, 1965. Photo courtesy of Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin



Paul Bowles, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, garden outside Burroughs' room at Villa Mouneria, Tangier, 1961."—Caption and photo by Allen Ginsberg.



"Gregory Corso, Paul Bowles, William Burroughs, behind him two dead boys: Ian Sommerville & Michael Portman, under the wall of Bill's garden, Villa Mouneria, Tanger, 1961."—Caption and photo by Allen Ginsberg.

# The Subject of Paul Bowles

WAYNE POUNDS

Two documents in the Paul Bowles collection at the University of Texas at Austin illuminate the authorial subject in Bowles's development as a writer and his theory of fiction. By "authorial subject" I mean the structure of the author's subjectivity within the work—consciousness, the myth of the ego or self. As a context for these documents, I would like to start with the frequently encountered observation that a geographical division between desert and jungle structures Bowles's fiction. From this same division, Bowles elaborates a theory of his development as a writer and a theory of his fictional practice.

The minimal form in which the first clue surfaces—the document is an aphorism of two sentences' length—suggests the difficulty of the elaboration. As is fitting for a writer who has insisted that he is a composer and thus lacks "the normal cerebral functioning of a writer,"<sup>1</sup> the aphorism has remained mute, private, unpublished, and as such shows Bowles's distrust of his ability to analyze or theorize. The contradiction implicit in this uncommunicated communication is traceable again in the published interviews, in which Bowles consistently denies his capacity to analyze the sources of his fictional art and at the same time supplies the outlines at least of the theory of which he insists he is incapable. We can find our way initially by looking at the aphorism, which, unfolded, implies the writer's whole development.

The aphorism is one of five on a single blue holograph sheet which bears no date. It probably dates from the early Fifties, however, when Bowles seems to have had a taste for aphorisms. It reads:

To develop one's sensual characteristics, no matter how subtly, leaves one at the mercy of the physical world and its increasingly destructive onslaught. It takes an exceedingly insensitive person today to be able to continue being an artist.<sup>2</sup>

## TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

Overheard here is the writer, in his first maturity, imagining the stripping of all excess which he or historical necessity will require of himself in his desert ordeal as a twentieth-century writer. The "increasingly destructive onslaught of the physical world" also recalls Port and Kit, the protagonists of *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), and suggests a reading of that first novel as a portrait of the artist. Bowles legitimizes this reading when he tells Oliver Evans: "I didn't plan *The Sheltering Sky* at all. . . . It was an autobiographical novel, a novel of memory." Not that Bowles identifies with Port, but "One's first novel often writes itself; everything comes out in it and it's generally the best novel that one writes. In that sense it was autobiographical—the one I'd been hatching for ten or fifteen years without knowing it."<sup>3</sup>

The aphorism imagines Port without Kit, masculine rationality ridding itself of all but the most tenuous relationship to feminine feeling, a strategy which sounds much like the one Hemingway learned in the trenches of World War I (and based on the same sexist perception) but which I read as an attack on the imperial Western ego or (as it is now fashionable to say) the bourgeois subject. I have argued elsewhere that *The Sheltering Sky*, like Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, projects a single consciousness whose warring faculties are embodied in separate chapters, in which scheme Port corresponds to rational will and Kit to feeling.<sup>4</sup>

Though the psychology of that argument now sounds old-fashioned, such a reading has the virtue of revealing a therapeutic function for the author, allowing him to imagine the failure of the strategy which, as the aphorism suggests, outlines his own development. The life as well as the novel clarifies that what was being repudiated in Kit was not merely an unwanted or unmanageable load of feeling but more specifically the bourgeois commodity muse whose passion is ownership—the passion Kit acts out as she empties her luggage in a Saharan hotel to enumerate her possessions—and whose unnameable repressed fear is a fear of the revolution in consciousness which would strip her of property, identified with self. Bowles gave his overall project its most succinct statement when he told Lawrence D. Stewart in 1969, "The destruction of the ego has always seemed an important thing. I took it for granted that that was what really one was looking for in order to attain knowledge and the ability to live."<sup>5</sup>

Bowles's twofold achievement in the thirty years that have followed the first decade of his fiction, from "The Scorpion" in 1945<sup>6</sup> to *The Spider's House* in 1955, signals the success of the project which the aphorism envisions. First is his own fiction, which, though rather

## THE SUBJECT OF PAUL BOWLES

misrepresented by a criticism focused almost exclusively on his Fifties' work, has steadily grown in volume and weight through *The Time of Friendship* (1967), *Things Gone and Things Still Here* (1977), and *Midnight Mass* (1981), to name only one major work from each decade. North African settings have steadily displaced the jungles of the first half of *The Delicate Prey* and North African characters the traumatized Western pilgrim, the principal character of the first decade. Though certain obsessive themes remain constant, the raw social material on which the author draws has become thoroughly North-Africanized, a movement from jungle to desert which parallels the course of artistic development set out in the aphorism. In this same period, starting in 1954,<sup>7</sup> Bowles has produced the series of collaborative translations from oral-tradition Moroccan storytellers which I would cite as the second phase of his achievement. This extensive work, which has resulted in at least twelve volumes to date, taken in conjunction with Bowles's own fiction of the period, manifests the increased powers of assimilation of the authorial self in its confrontation with the alien Other. The achievement concretizes the sense of Bowles's retort to an interviewer in 1981: "I have no ego."<sup>8</sup>

"The destruction of the ego," says Bowles and uncovers in one phrase the philosopher's stone that has lain simultaneously hidden and disclosed in the field of his writing. The project to destroy the ego also represents the crux of his affinity with Poe, who recorded, as D. H. Lawrence observed, "the disintegration and sloughing of the old consciousness."<sup>9</sup> Across the years it has been an obligatory gesture for reviewers to note the Poe relationship (conspicuously announced in the dedication to *The Delicate Prey*), but neither they nor his academic critics have known what to make of it.<sup>10</sup> The one exception among the reviewers is Tennessee Williams, a longtime friend of Bowles, who wrote perceptive reviews of his two first books.<sup>11</sup> The typical reviewer response, however, has been one variation or another on Leslie Fiedler's early labeling of Bowles as a pornographer of horror.<sup>12</sup> An essay by one such critic, openly hostile to the work of Bowles and a group of his contemporaries, provoked a letter which represents Bowles's earliest and remains his most discursive statement of his theory of fiction.

The letter, like the aphorism, was stillborn in manuscript, never sent out. When I first read it ten years ago, it aroused my curiosity, as indeed it must have intrigued Lawrence D. Stewart, who quotes half of its final paragraph in his 1974 study.<sup>13</sup> Bowles's reference to the hostile critic's essay is vague:

I went wandering in the native quarter yesterday and discovered •

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a little shop which had for sale two dozen pocket books in English, the Avon Modern Writing # 2 among them. . . . When I got back here to the hotel I found in the book an article (by you) called TAOTT in which my work was mentioned.

The article in question is Hilton Kramer's "The Abuse of the Terrible" in the *Avon Book of Modern Writing No. 2* (1954).<sup>14</sup> Kramer groups Bowles with Tennessee Williams, Carson McCullers, and Truman Capote as influential writers who "have a special need of violence and terror in their works: again and again it rescues them from the inertia to which the denigration of their own medium exposes them."<sup>15</sup> The "denigration" in question, viewed with the help of thirty years' hindsight, appears to be the lack of interest of Bowles and company in the well-crafted novel as defined by Henry James and E. M. Forster and codified in Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1957).

Kramer's criticism echoes the conservative irritation of John Aldridge's better-known *After the Lost Generation* (1951), which complains that writers like Capote, McCullers, and John Hawkes do not deal with political tension or social significance but rather with the perils of private vision.<sup>16</sup> Kramer adds to this somewhat musty critical debate a particular violence of language. He sees the abuse of the terrible as cutting "like a scar across the face of fiction in our time." A writer like Williams is "afflicted" by "the total absence of a novelistic imagination." Bowles's novels are marred by a failure of "modulation and control" of their "shocking events." "Like Williams and Mrs. McCullers, Bowles suffers from a disability in regard to the novel form; it requires an idea of society and character, and ideas in general, with which his mind has little traffic."<sup>17</sup> Kramer's criticism centers on the traditional formal elements of the well-crafted novel—character and plot. Although "agonizing patterns of human life pass through the pages" of these four novelists,

they pass virtually untouched by analysis. . . . A real exploration of this behavior would require two things which these writers reject: a fictional method which would encompass the relation of society to its members, and a view of life in which the various modes of sexual aberration would be considered to have something less than heroic distinction. Lacking these, only some instance of the terrible, some gratuitous evocation of violence, can rescue their characters from fatal inertia, and it is upon the terrible that the burden falls for making these characters interesting and meaningful. But this cannot be done without

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violating the sense of life which the fictional form itself implies. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Kramer here reveals the hidden agenda which explains his animus against Bowles et al.: a conservative nostalgia for a society in which violence is confined to the "meaningful" and accepted norms keep aberration firmly distanced. It is a longing for the mom-and-apple-pie society promised by the middle-class prosperity of the Eisenhower years and belied by the Cold War and racial conflict.

It is instructive to note how readily Kramer allows for violence in Dostoyevski, Kafka, and Faulkner "as modern masters who make authentic use of the terrible" by accepting "the necessary subjection" of art to life. The very language of homage reveals how the modernist revolution has been denatured and commodified so that its once scandalous perpetrators are now "masters," sponsored by corporate enterprise and safe for general consumption. As Frederic Jameson writes of Kramer and the mission of the latter's *New Criterion* for the 1980s, Kramer seeks "to eradicate from the 'high seriousness' of the classics of the modern their fundamentally anti-middle-class stance and the protopolitical passion which informs the repudiation, by the great modernists, of Victorian taboos and family life. . . ."<sup>19</sup> In this perspective, Bowles and company disturb Kramer because their art, with its insistence on the pathology under the placid surface of middle-class consumption, is not subjected to Kramer's view of life.

Bowles's response to Kramer, like his interview statements on theory, begins with denial, questioning the formal necessity of traditional novelistic character and valorizing the role of violence. Bowles denies there is any validity in Kramer's grouping him with Capote, McCullers, and Williams: at the same time, in so doing, he suggests a different sort of validity for the grouping. Kramer's category is invalid, says Bowles with characteristic modesty, because the other three "are better writers than I, considerably better known, and infinitely more successful commercially. . . ." More to the point as a reply to Kramer, "the lumping of our names together is less a self-evident truth on which to base a critical edifice than a somewhat arbitrary device used to further the development of your particular thesis." Bowles pushes his denial into more substantive areas, distinguishing salient qualities of the other three writers' work from his own, but before he does so he offers his own qualification of the validity of the grouping:

Were I not conveniently contemporaneous with the 3 writers of the Deep South, there would be little likelihood of our being

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pushed together into a group. What have I in common with them save the fact that I too am neurotic, Gentile, and autodidact? This statement, a gesture of community which is surely unique in Bowles's writing, demands a moment's pause.

Both the nature of the group in question and the terms of Bowles's admission suggest opposition. Ihab Hassan, writing about Carson McCullers in 1961, asserts that "the vitality of Southern fiction derives its energy from the energy of opposition, which is but another way of saying that the Southern novel, insofar as it has a regional identity, is more openly hostile to those popular assumptions the country entertains at large."<sup>20</sup> The three terms Bowles chooses define a community of opposition among writers who have neither submitted their emotions to standardization, their spirits to religious orthodoxy, nor their minds to the indoctrination of higher education. The term "gentile" suggests the separation of Bowles and company from critically recognized Jewish writers, and the rhetorical question in which the term is embedded indicates Bowles's own separation from the commercial success of the Southern iconoclasts.

The publishers of Bowles's autobiography insisted that he make it into a documentary of people he has known, and the result was much more revealing of the social man than of the artist, who found the task of writing it frustrating.<sup>21</sup> We have only to read the long list of celebrated acquaintances—including Capote, McCullers, and Williams—on the back cover of the Putnam edition to be assured that as an artist Bowles had always lived among his own kind. Nonetheless, the interviews make clear that as a writer Bowles had always defined himself against any kind of literary community, not by attributing to himself any distinction but by a more basic refusal to participate. He tells Bailey that he "never wanted to become part of a community" and that his role as the all-time expatriate does not arise from any professional antagonism, which might define him in relation to an alleged community.<sup>22</sup> "I think of myself as completely alone, and I imagine other people as a part of something else," he says; and, "I don't want to take part in literary life, that's the whole point."<sup>23</sup>

What chiefly distinguishes Bowles from the other three writers, as he argues his case to Kramer, is their different handling of character. He points out that the other writers have worked in theater, while his own "inability"—again, the strategy of denial—"to write dialogue precludes the possibility of such lucrative work." Bowles has the courage and the insight to insist on this lack and to fathom it:

Still, that very lack is a distinguishing characteristic. Another one

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is that the members of our Deep South contingent, no matter what you may say, are essentially interested in people, in the details of their lives, their mannerisms, their speech, their thoughts and tastes [whereas for me people are shadows, abstractions. If it were possible, I should write without using people at all.] (Bracketed material is crossed out in the original.)

This reply points in two directions: backward to the traditional complaint of the American writer about cultural impoverishment, and ahead to Bowles's later discussion of the block which prevented him from writing fiction between early adolescence and roughly 1945, a period of about twenty years.

Though the traditional complaint, given classic statement by Hawthorne and James, asserts a poverty of social context, Bowles characteristically asserts a lack in himself. In the autobiographical account of his twenty-year silence, he says he could not write because he "failed to understand life" (for "life" read "other people"); he was unable to "find points of reference which the hypothetical reader might have in common with me."<sup>24</sup> Bowles made up for his social deprivation by "driving a shaft into the primitive strata of his mind," as Henry A. Murray asserts of Herman Melville.<sup>25</sup> He began inventing his own myths, "adopting the point of view of the primitive mind" through the "Surrealist method of abandoning conscious control and writing whatever words came from the pen."<sup>26</sup> The first results were animal legends, then "tales of animals disguised as 'basic human' beings." Thus he found the "unexpected little gate" through which he "crept back into the land of fiction writing." Several noted critics of American culture, including Lionel Trilling, Marius Bewley, and Richard Chase, would see in Bowles's discovery a strategy characteristic of the American writer. As Trilling writes, "American writers of genius have not turned their minds to society. Poe and Melville were quite apart from it; the reality they sought was only tangential to society."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, Kramer's objections result from misconceiving the tradition in which Bowles was working.

In a 1975 interview, when Bowles returns to the function of character in his fiction, his thinking is more complex and his expression more assured. To the interviewer's query whether Bowles's characters have an unconscious drive for self-destruction, Bowles replies by refusing to privilege character in the novelistic structure:

the motivation of characters in fiction like mine should be a secondary consideration. I think of characters as if they were props in the general scene of any given work. . . the characters

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are made of the same material as the rest of the work. Since they are activated by the other elements of the synthetic cosmos, their own motivations are relatively unimportant.<sup>28</sup>

That is, Bowles rejects the idea that his characters should naively reflect the bourgeois ego, Kramer's "sense of life," and he subordinates character to an equality with other compositional elements. To the charge that his characters are neurotic Bowles now has the answer: "most of the Occidentals I know *are* neurotic. But that's to be expected; that's what we're producing now. They're the norm." The important term is "norm," and as a writer Bowles is in as good a position as his critics to define it. "The typical man of my fiction reacts to inner pressures the way the normal man *ought* to be reacting to the age we live in. Whatever is intolerable must produce violence." This is very close to R. D. Laing's critique of contemporary Western society: the violence we act out is the violence we have first internalized as culture, the violence of a "civilization apparently drives to its own destruction."<sup>29</sup>

In the letter to Kramer, Bowles defends his lack of interest in traditional novelistic character by valorizing the role of violence. He tells Kramer that the latter's insistence on "character analysis" and "social reality" is arbitrary, and in this argument the recent history of the novel confirms him. As John Hawkes stated in 1965, "I began to write fiction on the assumption that the enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting, theme, and having once abandoned these familiar ways of thinking about fiction, totality of vision or structure was all that remained."<sup>30</sup> But Bowles's 1954 reasons for de-emphasizing character are very much his own:

There is a fairly large section of the reading public for which reading performs a kind of therapy. What you call "the terrible" is what I should call merely a counter-irritant to the vague sense of anguish of which this public is conscious. Such devices as character delineation, truly rational motivation, and psychological analysis are so much dead weight in the novel written for these people. What they want is escape literature in reverse. The more unpleasant the experiences of reading the less painful the return to the familiar disgust with life.

In Bowles's later formulations of this theory, violence has either a therapeutic or a didactic value for the reader, and the writing has a therapeutic effect for the writer. In the Evans interview he asserts a didactic value for the reader and a therapeutic one for himself. "If there's anything to teach in 'A Distant Episode,' it can only be taught through shock . . . [You must] make the reader understand what the situation would be like to *him*. And that involves shock."<sup>31</sup> For Bowles

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himself, "a lot of my stories were definitely therapeutic. . . . I needed to clarify an issue for myself, and the only way of doing it was to create a fake psychodrama in which I could be everybody." In a later interview he asserts that "a good jolt of vicarious horror" can cause the reader to question values and that, for the writer, many of the stories are "simple emotional outbursts. They came out all at once, like eggs, and I felt better afterwards."<sup>32</sup> In the 1981 interview Bowles speaks more generally, referring to the reader as well as himself when he says, "The violence served a therapeutic purpose." Bowles sees violence as a radical datum of all life. "The process of life presupposes" it; "our life" and "the entire structure of what we call civilization" is predicated upon it. What distinguishes man from the plant and animal worlds is that "only man can conceptualize violence. Only man can enjoy the idea of destruction."<sup>33</sup>

At this point we are better able to define what Bowles's fiction offers in place of the delights of traditional character. The answer is consciousness. The letter to Kramer is conspicuously silent in this central regard, just as it says nothing about the master project to destroy the ego. The former, however, is implicit in the latter, since to destroy the ego is to replace it with another structure or form of consciousness. It is impossible to say when either notion became clear in Bowles's thinking, but both are well articulated in the interview with Oliver Evans, originally conducted in 1964. Asked what he looks for in the fiction of other writers, Bowles states: "accurate expressions, for accurate accounts of states of mind, the way in which the consciousness of each individual is reported in the book. How the author makes us believe in the reality of his settings."<sup>34</sup> Here at the level of theory Bowles asserts the equal and complementary relationship of landscape and character. He restates it in the Halpern interview, when he says of characters: they are "generally represented as integral parts of situations, along with the landscape, and so it's not very fruitful to try to consider them in another light."<sup>35</sup>

A more insistent reading would say that what composes the "situation" in a Bowles story is precisely character and landscape, concealing and revealing each other: landscape, the externalization of character; character, the internalization of landscape. Together they provide the structure of that unaltering significance about which an interviewer asks: "In retrospect, would you say there has been something that has remained important to you over the years? Something which you have maintained in your writing?" And Bowles: "Continuing consciousness, infinite adaptability of human conscious-

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ness to outside circumstances, the absurdity of it all, the hopelessness of this whole business of living.”<sup>36</sup>

The dialectic of concealment and revelation, to which Bowles's letter to Kramer has returned us here at the end, combines into a single pattern the life and the work, the social man and the solitary artist, which so many of Bowles's critics and interviewers have asserted to be split. (“Why is it that Americans expect an artist's work to be a clear reflection of his life?” growls Bowles.<sup>37</sup>) That the social man is subordinate or hidden in the writer should be read as a reflection of the hostility or indifference of a materialist culture to the artist, a matter I have not gone into but to which Bowles bears sufficient witness in the interviews.<sup>38</sup>

As a necessary condition for survival and development, the artist puts aside the warring emotions of the bourgeois self and projects and explores them in the image of the jungle. Early stories from *The Delicate Prey* reveal the jungle as the darkness where the internecine family conceals its warfare—and to escape which the flight to the desert beckons. In the all-revealing landscapes of the desert, however, the same predatory principle conceals itself in the shadows and in the oases of human habitation, and a nameless dread hides beyond the sheltering sky. In landscapes, character finds itself revealed; and in character, landscapes find their hidden significance, the language-mediated world of meaning. The dual landscapes of jungle and desert triangulate with a suppressed third, that of the United States, replicating the familiar image of contemporary history as a first world related by opposition and domination to a second and third. Immanent in this elaborating structure is History itself, the last horizon of concealment-revelation, from the knowledge of which the bourgeois ego has thus far protected us—and at what cost we all, in our most lucid moments, know. Like it or not, cognizant or not, we continue to obey Bowles's 1952 injunction: “You must watch your world as it cracks above your head.”<sup>39</sup>

*Coda*

The unmailed response to Hilton Kramer has lain buried in Bowles's archive so many years that the value of uncovering it might well be questioned. Bowles himself, when I wrote to ask him in 1984, had no memory of Kramer's essay or his response. When I sent him copies of both, he replied, “the considerations seem remote, the assumptions invalid. But it does remind me of the era when certain critics waxed irate with ‘decadent’ fiction. In this instance, one would like to have Kramer's definition of the ‘the terrible’ . . .”<sup>40</sup> I have

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suggested that what Kramer found terrible in Bowles's stories recording the dissolution of the bourgeois self was the threat to the entrenched privilege which his moralizing criticism represents. To criticize a historical phenomenon as decadent, whether the social anomie represented in the Fifties novel or the post-modernisms of the present, is to make a moralizing judgment which, as Frederic Jameson argues, is a "category mistake."<sup>41</sup> More trenchantly, Jameson shows how ethical criticism, which is "still the predominant form of literary and cultural criticism today," projects as "permanent features of 'human experience' . . . what are in reality the historical and institutional specifics of a determinate type of group solidarity or class cohesion." Contemporary wars around the globe daily remind us, if any reminder were needed, how, as Jameson says, "all ethics lives by exclusion and predicates certain types of Otherness or evil"<sup>42</sup>—the otherness, indeed, of which it has been Bowles's accomplishment to exemplify the possibility of assimilation. The hostility of Kramer's language evidences his having perceived the threat which Bowles's art represents.

The intervening decades have increasingly embattled Kramer, as the novel has continued to turn away from the "sense of life" he felt suitable to it. Kramer is now Editor of the recently founded *New Criterion*, and the curious reader will find the sequel of his argument in its pages.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Oliver Evans, 8 Jan. 1968, in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. All manuscript material quoted by permission of Paul Bowles and the HRC.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), p. 50. Stewart quotes the whole page of aphorisms, running them together as a single paragraph intended to show the attitude he argues is dramatized in *The Sheltering Sky*.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," *Mediterranean Review*, 1 (1971), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Pounds, *Paul Bowles: The Inner Geography* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), Ch. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, pp. 152–53.

<sup>6</sup> This date is authorized by Bowles in *Without Stopping: An Autobiography* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, "An Interview," p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Bailey, "The Art of Fiction LXVII: Paul Bowles," *Paris Review*, 81 (1981), 69. On otherness and race, see Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *Critical Inquiry*, 12 (1985), 59–87.

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<sup>9</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; rpt. New York: Viking, 1961), p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> An exception to this generalization is a recent essay by Catherine Rainwater, "‘Sinister Overtones,’ ‘Terrible Phrases’: Poe’s Influence on the Writings of Paul Bowles,” *Essays in Literature*, 11 (1984), 253–66. Ms. Rainwater shows no awareness of my earlier work, dating from 1976, in which all her findings specific to Bowles and Poe are already contained.

<sup>11</sup> Tennessee Williams, “An Allegory of Man and His Sahara,” *New York Times Book Review*, 4 Dec., 1949, pp. 7, 38; and “The Human Psyche—Alone,” *Saturday Review*, 33 (1950), 19–20.

<sup>12</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (New York: Dell, 1966), p. 502. The first edition appeared in 1960.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, pp. 132–33.

<sup>14</sup> *The Avon Book of Modern Writing No. 2*, ed. William Phillips and Philip Rahv (New York: Avon Publications, 1954), pp. 153–58.

<sup>15</sup> Kramer, “The Abuse of the Terrible,” p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> John Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951). For a corrective view and two standard contemporary interpretations, see Irving Malin, *The New American Gothic* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 3–13; and Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 205–58. See also Richard Chase on “romance” in *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957).

<sup>17</sup> Kramer, “The Abuse of the Terrible,” pp. 157–59.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> Frederic Jameson, “The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate,” *New German Critique*, No. 33 (Fall 1984), 57. On the commodification of modernism, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory* (Oxford, Eng.: Basil Blackwell, 1983), pp. 47–53 and passim.

<sup>20</sup> Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, pp. vii, 205. Hassan quotes Truman Capote’s protest, “I don’t like to be called a Southern writer” (p. 230).

<sup>21</sup> Bailey, “The Art of Fiction,” p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Halpern, “Interview with Paul Bowles,” *Tri Quarterly*, 33 (1975), 168.

<sup>24</sup> Bowles, *Without Stopping*, pp. 262, 52–53.

<sup>25</sup> Henry A. Murray, Introd. to *Pierre or the Ambiguities* by Herman Melville (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), p. xxx.

<sup>26</sup> Bowles, *Without Stopping*, pp. 261–62.

<sup>27</sup> Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), p. 206.

<sup>28</sup> Halpern, “Interview,” pp. 165–66.

<sup>29</sup> R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> John J. Enck, “John Hawkes,” in *The Contemporary Writer: Interviews with Sixteen Novelists and Poets*, ed. L. S. Dembo and Cyrena N. Pondrom (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1972), p. 11. Gerald Graff asserts, “In postmodern fiction, character, like external reality, is something ‘about which nothing is known,’ lacking in plausible motive or discoverable ‘depth.’” (“The Myth of the

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Postmodern Breakthrough," in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcom Bradbury [Glasgow: Fontana, 1977]), p. 234.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, "An Interview," pp. 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Halpern, "Interview," pp. 171, 168.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, "The Art of Fiction," p. 80.

<sup>34</sup> Evans, "An Interview," p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Halpern, "Interview," p. 166.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, "An Interview," p. 8; Halpern, "Interview," pp. 167-69; and Bailey, "The Art of Fiction," pp. 79, 81.

<sup>39</sup> Harvey Breit, "Talk with Paul Bowles," *New York Times Book Review*, 9 Mar. 1952, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Letters to the author, 20 May 1984 and 6 June 1984.

<sup>41</sup> Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, No. 146 (1984), 85.

<sup>42</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 59-60. Two earlier major studies that assert this argument are Gilles Delleuze and Felix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972); and Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>43</sup> Or see Kramer's "The Art Scene of the 80's," *New Art Examiner*, Oct. 1985, pp. 24-28. For a critique of Kramer's "peculiarly neoconservative twist," see J. Hoberman, "The Discreet Art of the Bourgeoisie," *Nation*, 30 Nov. 1985, pp. 590-93; and Jameson, "The Politics of Theory," pp. 57-58.

# The Child in the Text: Autobiography, Fiction, and the Aesthetics of Deception in *Without Stopping*

MARILYN MOSS

Paul Bowles's autobiography, *Without Stopping*, has received relatively little attention since it appeared in 1972. What slight attention it has received is critical. Paul Metcalf has recently called *Without Stopping* "a disappointment" and "an emptiness," saying that "It is hard to imagine how a man who can write as well as he [Bowles] does . . . could indulge in so much unrevealing personal trivia. One can only assume that it must be for money? . . . or Fame? . . . or, simply, notice?"<sup>1</sup> On a more generous note, Gore Vidal, in his introduction to Bowles's *Collected Stories*, while calling "the memoir. . . pleasurable for those who can read between the lines," admits also that "we don't learn very much about what the subject had in mind."<sup>2</sup> *Without Stopping* is an autobiography that some Bowles admirers would not only dismiss as unsatisfactory, but even excise entirely from the Bowles canon. Given its author's acute aversion to introspection as well as the seemingly offhanded style of reportage that characterizes this text, these comments are understandable.

However, the failure of *Without Stopping* to win more than such passing critical attention is at the very least unfortunate. An autobiography by Bowles, one of our prominent contemporary American writers, should invite careful consideration, not only for the means by which it contributes to an understanding of our national literary psyche, but for the way that the unique presentation of its author's psychology teaches us to read other autobiographical writing. More specifically, as I mean to demonstrate here, a close investigation

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of *Without Stopping* will prove instrumental to our continued discourse on the relatedness of autobiography to fiction, an alliance, as it were, that figures prominently in Bowles's text. With the reissue of *Without Stopping* now at hand<sup>3</sup>—thirteen years after its initial publication, and for a number of those years out of print—it is now time to reevaluate this problematic text, and in so doing to reexamine this most curious of contemporary American writers—a writer, who, now in his seventy-sixth year, while he has continued to produce an abundance of fiction and poetry, has chosen nevertheless to keep himself, for the better part of his life, both psychologically and literally on the margins of mainstream American letters.

The misunderstanding between reader and text in the case of Bowles's *Without Stopping* is essentially a simple one: while readers of his autobiography have clearly responded to Bowles's self-proclaimed aversion to introspection in the text, they have failed to understand this aversion as a troubled response to the threat of self-exposure that autobiography poses for Bowles—a threat that he means to push down by inventing for himself various fictive poses in the text, from the pose of author-as-victimized-child to the attempted fiction of the adult-now-turned-reporter who, as autobiographer, must then stand back from the text, and, in Bowles's own words, "tell a good story." The intention of this study is to locate the aesthetic strategies of Bowles's aversion to introspection in *Without Stopping*, strategies which lead overwhelmingly to the fictive-making impulses of this autobiographer—and fiction here for Bowles means little other than a device for concealment, a means of avoiding meeting his reader head on. Even as he exposes himself, he protects himself against the threat of such direct confrontation with a multiplicity of diversionary tactics: to disappear into the text and reemerge concealed as a subject of his own invention so as to render himself unsusceptible to the scrutiny of his reader.

As current discourse on autobiography teaches us, autobiographical texts, not unlike fictional texts, embody a unique and cogent aesthetic structure; what is more, they embody what we might term a *psychoaesthetics*—a system of textual strategies that exhibit the autobiographer's psychological attitude toward re-creating his or her life in the text. We can locate this psychoaesthetics only if we attend to the *way* an autobiographer remembers and re-creates that life in the text as well as *what* he or she chooses to remember.<sup>4</sup> I would suggest here that we can locate the integrity of Bowles's aesthetic in *Without Stopping* only if we

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attend to the way he attempts to fictionalize—and thus conceal—himself in this autobiography.

On the surface of this text, it *looks* as if Bowles is not telling us much about himself. Thus, he will write, characteristically, of events in the latter part of the text, "It is precisely at this point where memory becomes less distinct. The recall is not blocked, it is simply that I was busy living."<sup>5</sup> To this his readers have responded that *Without Stopping* indeed stops short of being much other than a travelogue of names and dates in Bowles's life. However, if we look closer at the *way* such diversions are organized, we find that Bowles is indeed telling us a great deal about himself; moreover, that he is telling us a great deal about his anxiety in being an autobiographer. Yet, we can locate Bowles's psychology in *Without Stopping* only if we can accept this text on Bowles's own terms and accept that the terms of his aesthetic are deeply situated in *deception*—deception as a style of functioning with the burden and threat of self-exposure, deception, learned early and successfully as a child, that leads ultimately to the shelter of Bowles's own fictive-making impulses.

Early on in *Without Stopping*, Bowles writes that, as a child, "I became an expert in the practice of deceit. I could feign enthusiasm for what I disliked and, even more essential, hide whatever enjoyment I felt." In deceiving others, he tells us, he meant to deflect attention away from himself, a skill he came to regard early in his life as "a great victory." Bowles reminds us within the first few pages of his autobiography that he urgently attempted to release himself from the constant surveillance of his family that he felt left him powerless. He writes that he did not know other children until the age of five, leading him to feel subjected to a world of adults—one that included his grandparents and his extended family—"each," he writes, "eager to try out his favorite system on me and study the results" (WS, p. 22).

Yet Bowles's experience of family, he maintains, rested fundamentally with his experience of his father, Claude, a man whose persistent intrusion into his son's life, scrupulously and strategically recorded in the text, was experienced by the young Bowles at times as nothing less than life-threatening. In an attempt to control the threat his father posed, Bowles records also that he learned early in his young life to deceive—thus, defy—his father, a maneuver that resulted in a growing hostility between the two. Bowles writes of the time his father beat him for his refusing to relinquish to Claude Bowles the secret notebooks Bowles kept in his room. "It began a new stage in the development of hostilities between us," he writes, "I vowed to devote my life to his

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destruction, even though it meant my own—an infantile conceit, but one which continued to preoccupy me for many years" (WS, p. 45). Bowles's great preoccupation in his childhood, we are led to conclude, became then a means of successfully shielding himself from his father. One possible means of protection, he tells us, was to *look* as if he were not thinking, thereby he could escape his father's censorship of his thoughts. This is a method he would later incorporate into fiction through his heroine, Aileen, in the short story, "The Echo"—clearly an autobiographical moment for Bowles.

As a child she had convinced herself that her head was transparent, that the thoughts there could be perceived immediately by others. Accordingly, when she found herself in uncomfortable situations, rather than risk the dangers of being suspected of harboring uncomplimentary or rebellious thoughts, she had developed a system of refraining from thinking at all. (CS, p. 55)

Aileen does eventually reveal herself to Prue, her mother's lover in "The Echo," and is able, at the story's conclusion, "to utter the greatest scream of her life." Yet Bowles could resolve in fiction a conflict that in his personal life he intimates he was never able to achieve. In reading *Without Stopping* we come to learn that the one great subject of his autobiography, of his life, was and is his inability to resolve the conflict resulting from his struggle with his father—a struggle for authority stemming from his inability to gain control over and achieve autonomy from his father.

This conflict presented special problems for Bowles when he came to write *Without Stopping*. The prospect of self-exposure that autobiography poses for Bowles causes him, the text implies, much anxiety, thus triggering once again the fear he experienced as a child of being susceptible to his father, Claude. In this regard, the childhood strategies for self-concealment—of making fictions in the face of this father—now resurface in the text of *Without Stopping* in relation to his audience. Moreover, I suspect that Bowles perceives the reader of this autobiography to be the father. Thus he remains emotionally absorbed in defending himself against—*defying*—this reader-father, likewise triggering the impulse to conceal the text, his very life, within the aesthetic strategies of deception. That is to say, he now reconstructs his life deeply narrativized within the layers of a fiction—a fiction that renders him now a creature of his own device and making. Thus he can conceal himself from the authority that the reader represents. To

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protect himself from the authority of the reader is tantamount to protecting himself from the structuring absence of the father.<sup>6</sup>

While Norman Holland has stated that all autobiographies are fictions, Erik Erikson has said that a man writes his autobiography to verify a myth of himself. In this regard, Bowles constructs in *Without Stopping* first and foremost a myth of himself as the child victimized by the hand of the father. James Olney writes that in autobiography the self is revealed through metaphorical structures. In Bowles's text, his re-creation of himself lies deeply rooted in the metaphors of the archetypal adolescent. Patricia Meyer Spacks has written of adolescence as an organizing principle in autobiography, saying that we see the subject then "ever finding objects of defiance, locating novel experiences,"<sup>7</sup> and for Bowles, ever resisting self-exposure. Two specific fictive forms or styles of functioning operate in *Without Stopping*—first, the fiction that gives Bowles the greatest sense of pleasure and control—the conception of himself as the victimized and emotionally abused child. Second, however, as Bowles relinquishes his "childhood" to the presentation of the "adult" in this text, the coherence of this first fiction curiously dissolves and dissipates, transforming itself instead into a narrative seeped in anxiety, thus aversion, deception, and defiance of the reader. That is, in the latter part of *Without Stopping*, a less successful and cogent fiction emerges: the fiction of the autobiographer who, as "objectified reporter," paradoxically emerges and remains fully absorbed in those childhood strategies of defiance in which Bowles's identity is so deeply situated.

In reconstructing his childhood in *Without Stopping*, Bowles centers his narrative around his father, Claude. It was this father, he informs us, from whose constrictive New England forms of self-discipline Bowles urgently attempted to extricate himself, and whose presence he reexperiences in the autobiographical act. His father, we are told, became for Bowles the prototype of male dominance that led him to identify early in his life with the women in his extended family. To escape the authority of male discipline, Bowles's first literate fictions, written while he was still a child, depicted heroines who traveled perilous roads before landing safely on exotic soil. We are led to assume that it was Claude Bowles's attempt to dominate his young son's life that also led Bowles to seek out the femaleness of exotic and erotic landscapes in North Africa later in his life. Bowles experienced his father as an intrusive force who could not be controlled. He was

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ultimately nothing less than the force that drove Paul Bowles into his own fictions.

As a young child, Bowles writes, he had already experienced episodes of anxiety and depersonalization. He felt himself to be at odds with his body as well as with his physical environment. "The best way of describing it," he writes of one of these episodes, "is to say that the connection between me and my body was instantaneously severed" (WS, p. 59). Words whose meaning he knew well could suddenly become unfamiliar to him. "This astonished me," he writes, "it also gave me a vague feeling of unease" (WS, p. 9). Bowles began early on to feel an undefined sense of menace in his life, one which he associates with his father. The first recollection of Claude Bowles in the autobiography is linked to Paul's mother's illness, which originated from his breach-birth delivery. "Your mother is a very sick woman," Bowles recounts his father telling him when he was a young child, "and it's all because of you, young man. Remember that" (WS, p. 10). Bowles remarks that he was "bewildered and resentful" at the accusations that "I was the cause of my mother's continuing illness." Yet, he writes that by the age of four he already took for granted his father's "constant and alloyed criticism ... it was one of the inalterables of existence" (WS, p. 10). Bowles's maternal grandmother, he adds, was never at a loss to unleash her spleen for Claude Bowles, and he credits her with a narrative recounting the attempts of the father to kill Bowles when he was an infant.

When you were only six weeks old he did it. He came home one terrible night when the wind was roaring and the snow was coming down—a real blizzard—and marched straight into your room, opened the window up wide, walked over to your crib and yanked you out from under your warm blankets, stripped you naked, and carried you over to the window where the snow was sailing in. And that devil just left you there in a wicker basket on the windowsill for the snow to fall on. And if I hadn't heard you crying a little later, you'd have been dead inside an hour. (WS, p. 39)

While Bowles "recalls" his "excitement" as a child at learning of this "dramatic confrontation," this is in fact a narrative detailed, not by a child but by Bowles the adult autobiographer who relives his fear and hatred of the father in this narrative. Moreover, he reexperiences, in the present, the delight the child would soon learn to take in making fictions. This narrative is indeed mediated by the autobiographical act, so that what may have been historical truth has now been transformed

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into a "fictive" truth—a narrative dealing with the integrity of the childhood that Bowles so urgently wants to see for himself and present to his reader. Bowles surmounts a multitude of such narratives in describing his childhood in *Without Stopping*—a childhood that he impels his reader (no less than himself) to understand as an imprisonment dealt to him by the power of the father. He spent his days as a child, he writes, "playing by myself in the house except for the occasional hour when I was turned out in the backyard" (WS, p. 14). Of one of these occasions, he recounts:

on one side there were nine windows, looking out at me like nine eyes, and from any one of them could come a sudden shout of disapproval. If I stood still and watched the clock that was always placed in the window so I would know when the hour was up, I heard taps on a third-story window and saw my mother making gestures exhorting me to move around and play. But if I began to gallop around the yard, my father would call from the second story: "Calm down, young man!" (WS, p. 14)

Again with great detail and inventiveness, Bowles constructs this narrative to reinforce the undefined sense of entrapment he experienced as a child. What is more, he tells us, he came to regard his privacy as a tenuous matter, subject at any given time to his father's appropriation. In his bedroom, he says, he kept a toy chest which, "by Daddy's edict," had to be "locked up by six in the evening, all of its contents in order. Whatever remained outside would be confiscated and I would never see it again" (WS, p. 14). Bowles tells us that he began to lock his bedroom door, a move which inspired his father's wrath. When Claude Bowles beat his son for being denied access into this bedroom, the hostilities between father and son escalated to reach "new proportions." With this in mind, it would be no coincidence that years later, Bowles would explore and attempt to resolve this conflict with his father in the short story, "The Frozen Fields," through his fictional yet autobiographical self, Donald, the hero of the story.

Before Donald knew what was happening, his father had seized him with one hand while he bent over and with the other scooped up as much snow as he could. . . . As he felt the wet icy mass sliding down his back, he doubled over. His eyes were squeezed shut; he was certain his father was trying to kill him.

An unfamiliar feeling had come over him: he was not sorry for himself for being wet and cold, or even resentful at having been mistreated. He felt detached; it was an agreeable, almost voluptuous sensation which he accepted without understanding or questioning it. (CS, p. 274)

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Earlier in the story—a “fictionalization” of Bowles’s own move toward the “voluptuousness” of disengagement, and placed in a fictional representation of his grandparents’ farm in Connecticut—Donald had dreamed of a wolf who came into the woods, grabbing the father by the throat and carrying him off as his prey. At the story’s conclusion, Donald once again dreams of the wolf, thus becoming imaginatively one with the animal to signify his dominance over his father and the resolve of his separation from him. Yet, in this wish-fulfillment story, Bowles, even at a much later period in his life, could once again resolve such a conflict only in fiction.<sup>8</sup> He writes in *Without Stopping* that after his father beat him, he would fantasize devoting his life to Claude Bowles’s destruction, insisting that this fantasy preoccupied him for a great portion of his life. He understood, he tells us, that he would always “be kept from doing what I enjoyed and forced to do that which I did not,” and thus he concentrated on any means possible by which to deceive and escape his father. This feeling of helplessness, thus the hunger to defy his father, has now become the organizing psychology and textual strategy of the autobiography, a psychology coupled with Bowles’s early—and persistent—infatuation with the written word. “I could not make myself lie,” he writes, “inasmuch as the word and its literal meaning had supreme importance” (WS, p. 17). Yet he could “feign” enthusiasm through facial expression and what is more could appear to have no thoughts whatsoever. He could, if necessary, he insists, deceive his father by presenting to Claude Bowles a fiction of himself entirely divorced from the self that he hid in his “real” fictions: the secret notebooks and diaries he kept locked in his room.

It was Bowles’s mother, Rena, this autographer tells us, who also taught her son the powers of escaping the real world of the father for the shelter of his own mind—a skill that Bowles insists he never forgot. Rena Bowles taught her son a means of retreating into the “blankness” of his own thoughts, a powerful weapon that enabled Bowles to render himself “unsusceptible” to the hostilities he felt his father leveled at him. Again, Bowles constructs a narrative to explain this game between mother and son.

Did you ever try to make your mind a blank and hold it that way? You mustn’t imagine anything or remember anything or think of anything; not even think: “I’m not thinking anything”. . . I do it sometimes when I’m just resting in the afternoon, and I’ve got so that I can hold on to it for quite a while. I just go into the blank place and shut the door. (WS, p. 43)

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Bowles writes that he began to practice this game secretly and eventually managed to attain a desired "blank state." He could then disappear from two worlds at once: the world of adults, which he experienced as one of "distrust and intrigue," feeling fortunate "to be a child so as not to have to take part in it"; and he could protect himself from the world of children his own age, which he soon found to be "a world of unremitting warfare." He remembers that "my intuitions warned me that everything must be hidden from them; they were potential enemies" (WS, p. 27).

It becomes clear then that Bowles learned quickly and exquisitely the power that "making fictions," making himself disappear from the world, could give him. In *Without Stopping* he poses himself and invents himself as a child who learned by necessity to depend on the usefulness of his own imagination, as well as the tools of language, as a means of receding into his own safely concealed world. He could posture himself as speechless—hidden behind a wall of silence—when he needed to conceal himself; yet he could also invent a fictive world of imaginary characters through which he sublimated expression and desire. He writes that in school he took notes in a secret code of his own devising so that his classmates could not read them. Similarly, he would hand in class assignments to his teacher "written backwards . . . so that she could not interpret them." To interact with others on their own terms, insists Bowles, meant that he could be subjugated to them. "Vaguely I understood that laws were invented to keep you from doing what you wanted," he writes, and his intention was to rebel against the authority that made him so miserable.

It would seem that Bowles came to regard others as he regarded his own father, thus he anticipated that *any* adult or child was a potential enemy. As such, he organizes the narrative of his childhood in this autobiography as one of a child who, by necessity, learned to divorce himself from his social world instead of expressing himself in "secret diaries and notebooks . . . so heavy that I could hardly lift them to the center of my room." He recounts that "I made daily entries in the diary of several imaginary characters and continued to add books of information to my fictitious world." In short, he chose a world of interiority in the face of the social world around him, coming to think of himself as "nothing more and nothing less than a registering consciousness. . . . My nonexistence was a *sine qua non* for the validity of the invented cosmos" (WS, p. 53). He writes that he once invented a series of childlike fictions—again, identifying himself as a woman, and certainly as omnipotent—writing a sequence of stories in his notebooks

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about a female spy named Bluey Laber Dozlen who "sails from an unidentified European country to survive several marriages and divorces, as well as influenza and pneumonia from which everyone else dies" (WS, p. 35). What is more, by the age of thirteen Bowles found "an even more satisfactory way of not existing as myself," thus being able "to go on functioning":

This was a fantasy in which the entire unrolling of events as I experienced them was the invention of a vast telekinetic sending station. Whatever I saw or heard was simultaneously being experienced by millions of enthralled viewers. They did not see me or know that I existed, but they saw through my eyes. (WS, p. 45)

This narcissistic, borderline fantasy, fictionalized as a remembrance from childhood, reflects Bowles's present attitude toward the reader of *Without Stopping* no less than it speaks of his childhood feelings. It is an expression, recalled with amazing precision, as it were, of Bowles's desire always to retreat from this world: to subvert scrutiny of himself—first as the child and now as the adult autobiographer—to the point of becoming *invisible*. He adds, furthermore, that this childhood fantasy enabled him "to view rather than participate in my own existence." To secure this necessary posture before his reader, it is not surprising that his concluding statement regarding this childhood fantasy should be a declaration that by the time he entered high school he had found a multitude of ways to convince himself that "the world was not really there."

Bowles then tells us that, unknown to his father, he left the United States and sailed for Europe before reaching his twentieth birthday. Yet, despite this statement declaring his autonomy, his emotional independence, we see also his continued need to remain the child paradoxically tied to the father. Bowles immediately writes that, while in Europe, he initiated two close relationships with adults who figured as parental surrogates: he lived and traveled with his mentor, Aaron Copland, for several years after arriving in Europe; there he soon developed an ongoing intimate relationship with Gertrude Stein, who he indicates often reminded him of his grandmother. Stein renamed him, he adds, "because she insisted that I was really a Freddy and not a Paul" (WS, p. 106). This, he writes, seemed to him "the most personal kind of relationship."<sup>9</sup>

Bowles never successfully separates himself from his father in *Without Stopping*, even as he relinquishes the constructed narrative of his

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childhood to the presentation of his adult life. While he refers to Rena Bowles as "Mother," he continues to call Claude Bowles "Daddy," thereby continuing to perceive himself as the child in the text. Bowles remains emotionally absorbed in his infantile and adolescent idea of the father. That is to say, he demonstrates his continual remerging with the father in the very self-protective rhetoric and textual maneuvers manifested to deceive the father-now-turned-reader. In constructing his adult life in the autobiography, Bowles wishes to shed the authority figure, a desire that paradoxically only reflects his remaining fixation with the father. Bowles is an autobiographer whose psychology is so deeply situated in the conception of himself as the defiant, concealed child that the move toward emancipation and adulthood in the text triggers enough panic in him now to re-create the father in a new fictive context and construct. As Claude Bowles disappears from the text as an actual presence in the life of Bowles the child, now to become a structuring absence for Bowles's defiance, Bowles transfers his need for self-protection onto the reader. Thus the latter part of *Without Stopping* is immersed in such rhetoric as, "Since nothing was real, it did not matter too much" (WS, p. 105).

Bowles attempts, with much anxiety—yet with safety in that anxiety—to absolve himself of the responsibility for telling of his adult life. This is the safety of concealment in which Bowles's identity is likewise so deeply rooted. Yet, as the construction of himself as a child, abused by the "presence" of the father, afforded him great fictive and narrative possibilities, no such possibilities are available to Bowles as the "adult" here. Thus his narrative dissolves and transforms into a much less successful fictive pose of Bowles, who, if finding himself anxious and exposed at the prospect of his reader's ability to scrutinize him, quickly attempts to avert this reader by "fictionalizing" himself as the objectified reporter of the life of Paul Bowles. In this way, he speaks his adult life while simultaneously remaining deeply submerged in the defiance—hence the textual strategies of deception—that he impelled us to attend to in the construction of his childhood, the first part of the text. While these strategies now become an unsuccessful means of concealment, they are nonetheless an extension of the child and are central to an understanding of the psychology of Paul Bowles the autobiographer.

Bowles's overriding means of disavowal, of attempted deception, in the latter part of *Without Stopping* is "consciously" to deny the autobiographical act. He "denies" being the author of his own text, thereby disclaiming ownership of its contents and similarly disclaiming

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"ownership" of Paul Bowles, autobiographer. "Writing an autobiography is an ungratifying occupation at best," he writes. "It is not the kind of work one would expect most writers to enjoy doing" (WS, pp. 369-70). Bowles would like his reader to believe that autobiography is, at best, an unreliable means of knowing a man, of knowing a life. In enshrouding or inventing himself now as an objective and removed "reporter," he can write of autobiography, "It is the sort of journalism in which the report, rather than being an eyewitness account of an event, is instead only a memory of the last time it was recalled" (WS, p. 370). Bowles puts up stumbling blocks to his life and text here, a maneuver intended no less for his reader than for himself. As Lawrence Stewart reports, while Bowles was writing *Without Stopping*, he would say that "I work each day on the autobiography, but it gives me no pleasure as yet, perhaps because I am trying to remember things which are almost forgotten."<sup>10</sup> This admission would signify a perhaps unconscious move on Bowles's part to disengage himself from feelings that are painful—no less, conflicting—and would erupt during the autobiographical act. To protect himself, he now constructs his own "Platonic" hierarchy of untruths—a hierarchy that before anything signals once again the emergence of the child who wants desperately to shield himself from the father-reader. Hence, Bowles signifies that autobiography is "the telling of a good story," and what is more, that "a good story" may not necessarily denote the truth. Bowles wants his reader to believe that *this reporter's* means of storytelling may in fact be truth or fiction.

My first intention is to give a bare report of the principal events and nothing more and eventually allow an extension of that material. It must become increasingly obvious to the listener that I am withholding information; this can hardly be an endearing characteristic to observe in a friend. In the end I suppose a story told backwards out of uncertainty as to how much need be told could be indistinguishable from a story told backwards out of sheer perversity. (WS, p.189)

In suggesting to his reader that his "uncertainty" might be masked by and become indistinguishable from "sheer perversity," Bowles evokes the conflicts of his childhood: while he might expose himself to his father-reader and thus be able to have his needs met by this authority figure, this fantasy poses too great a threat, and to ease the anxiety of this conflict he then maneuvers a strategy whereby he warns his reader that he may elude him.

Since Bowles's first impulse is always to defy the authority figure,

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he continues to represent his adult life through the metaphors of the rebellious child. As a means by which to function with the fear of his reader's scrutiny of him, Bowles constructs a text of himself as a man (yet a child) absorbed with his own uprootedness, wanting to appear as elusive and unwilling to be pinned down by the particulars and the restrictions of any specific place or event in the text. Where readers of *Without Stopping* have criticized this autobiography as little more than a travelogue of names and events in Bowles's life, they are in truth witnessing Bowles's strategy to present his life as one lived through rebelliousness. Writing of his "nomadic" existence in Europe and North Africa in his adult years, Bowles's need to be seen as rebellious impels him to organize his text also around the metaphors of travel. He would have us believe that he intended always to leave America behind him: to shed the father by shedding the fatherland. Clearly, Bowles represents his appetite to deny America as inexhaustible.

Each day lived on this side of the Atlantic was one more day spent outside prison. I was aware of the paranoia in my attitude and that with each succeeding month of absence from the United States I was augmenting it. Still there is not much doubt that with sufficient funds I should have stayed indefinitely outside America. (WS, p. 165)

The fatherland, and so the father, becomes a significant object of defiance in Bowles's re-creation of his adult years. Though he records that he returned to the United States with some frequency before settling permanently in Tangier in 1947, he remains staunchly committed to his desire to escape anything America had to offer him. He insists that "a constantly changing life" was "the most pleasant of all possible lives"—and one, of course, that would require as little commitment as possible. Writing that he and his wife, Jane Bowles, lived in New York during the 1940s—admittedly for him a time of great productivity as a writer—he tells us nonetheless that he consistently suppressed the impulse "to get as far away as possible" from that city. America is clearly the nightmare from which Bowles seeks to awaken. He recalls that his curiosity about alien and primitive cultures—a curiosity and geography that pervade the novels and short stories written during these years—was "avid and obsessive . . . I had a placid belief that it was good for me to live in the midst of people whose motives I did not understand" (WS, p. 297). Yet, such an admission is likewise a warning to the reader of *Without Stopping*: it signals Bowles's expressed though perhaps unconscious desire that the reader of his

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autobiography will fail to understand the motives of Paul Bowles, and that reading this text will itself be not unlike traveling through an alien country.

Bowles writes also that, while traveling through Spanish Morocco to Tangier in the late 1930s, he wished to experience, "consciously, the ill-defined sensation" that "inexplicably" came upon him as he moved "toward unfamiliar regions." He wanted to find "that magical place which, in disclosing its secrets would give me ecstasy and wisdom—perhaps even death" (WS, p. 125). In rebelling against the felt oppressiveness of his childhood, Bowles now reconstructs his adult life in the autobiography as one that was subject to chance and lived "without conscious intervention." As an aesthetic strategy here, he would like, ultimately, to absolve himself of any responsibility for the course this life would seem to take. As Bowles would express this desire through his fictional self, Port, in the novel, *The Sheltering Sky*: "He had long since come to deny all purpose to the phenomena of existence." Thus Bowles describes how he came eventually to settle permanently in Tangier—not by conscious choice, he insists, but rather in response to a dream he had once had, a dream of a city in whose "magical streets" he had once wandered.

If Bowles is the traveler, no less the objectifying reporter, who uproots himself from the responsibility for and participation in the events in this text, this uprootedness once again manifests the earlier fiction of the displaced and depersonalized child. The aesthetic strategy of the adult Bowles is to represent himself as the displaced narrator of this text, posing himself as little other than the witness to events that have simply *happened*. In this fictive yet necessary pose, he attempts to shield himself from accountability for the life in this autobiography—a maneuver he plays out by dodging introspection. Yet, in doing so, he creates gaping holes in his narrative, holes into which he mysteriously disappears. His telling of how he came to write the short story, "Pages from Cold Point," is a stellar example of the style by which Bowles copes with, not only his persistent fear of intimacy with his reader, but also the anxiety of disclosing intimacy with others in his life who are integral to all episodes in the text. Bowles tells us that he wrote the short story, "Pages"—a fiction concerning a father and son remerging through a sexual encounter—in 1947 while on board ship to Tangier where he intended to settle. He writes that, the night previous to his departure, his anxious wife, Jane, had "misplaced" his passport, an unconscious expression that she disapproved of his leaving without her.

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Jane earnestly claimed to know nothing about it. Yet no one else had come into the apartment. We looked at her accusingly. She laughed, "You know I don't want you to go," she said. "So I must have hidden it."

I merely left the apartment, as though I were going away for the weekend (a very poor idea, as things turned out) and with far too much luggage boarded the ship. The stateroom was big, and the sea was calm all the way across. During the voyage I wrote a long story about an hedonist; it had been vaguely trying to get born for six months, ever since my visit to Jamaica. I finished it the day before we got to Casablanca and called it "Pages from Cold Point." Then we landed and Morocco took over. (WS, p. 276)

In this narrative, representative of Bowles's ability to shift, meteorically—and unconsciously—from feeling to action throughout this text, what he chooses to censor exhibits his enormous need to veil any access to his inner life. While implying that Jane's behavior did affect him on some level, he refuses to explore his *own* response to her behavior. He writes that "I merely left the apartment as if I were going away for the weekend," signifying that the feelings he experienced at the time of the incident, as well as during the autobiographical act, are suppressed in the service of concealment. Moreover, we do not know to whom the "we" refers ("We looked at her accusingly"), yet the "we" is significant, as throughout this autobiography Bowles implies that he and Jane infrequently lived alone and without other intimate companions, and this incident raises once more Bowles's hesitancy in identifying these other companions. Bowles "the reporter" sincerely believes that he is telling his life, and telling it as "a good story." Yet Bowles the autobiographer fears the consequences of intimacy with his reader. His means of coping with this conflict is to shift his attention abruptly here to having taken "too much luggage aboard ship," and to focus on his recalling that "the stateroom was big."

It is Bowles the objectified reporter who feels he must link the specifics of this incident chronologically, to report simply that Jane misplaced his passport, he boarded ship and wrote a short story called "Pages from Cold Point." Yet it is Bowles the reticent and fearful autobiographer who suppresses the emotions that, during the process of writing this autobiography, link these incidents with one another and hence trigger one another. For clearly, autobiography has less to do with sequential truth-telling than it does with the psychological import of recall. Yet the power that this narrative—this moment of recovery—presents to Bowles, and the anxiety it triggers, impels him to appear

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unaware of the relationship between these instances. We should, moreover, attend to his indirect and brief reference to his short story, "Pages from Cold Point," here. He calls it simply "a story about an hedonist," saying little more. Yet, considering the importance that the father plays in this autobiography, the importance that Bowles has consciously and unconsciously given this father, it would seem likely that the memory of having written this short story—of a father's sexual imposition on his son—would carry with it significant meaning for Bowles in the present. Yet Bowles denies the reader access to the genesis of "Pages." What is more, he relinquishes any further claim to being the author of this story, a strategy that is characteristic of Bowles's references to his fictions in this latter half of *Without Stopping*. Here, Bowles is impelled simply to relinquish himself to "the sea" that "was calm," and to write that "We landed and Morocco took over." His need to obstruct both his *and* his reader's path toward interiority is an act of denial in the face of self-exposure. Bowles clearly does not want to trust his reader, nor does he wish his reader to trust him.

While Bowles is able, more often than not, to recall or construct events microscopically (and it is here that we may witness the relationship of recall to invention), he chooses, nonetheless, to aim vision outward, not interiorly to investigate Bowles in the text. He does, indeed, move rapidly and "without stopping," his sequential narratives now perpetuating themselves on their own volition as if stopping to reflect would pose a clear and present danger, and *as if* the catalog of those names that postulate his life and text were, for the most part, not integral to these narratives. Where he might clarify relations with others, thereby exposing more of himself, he represents others instead as objects of defiance.

When he writes of how he came to adapt the theatrical production of *Huis Clos*, he focuses our attention to director John Huston's "ideological distortions" and ultimate "mutilation" of the play. In recounting how he came to orchestrate the ballet, *Dans un vieux parc solitaire et glace*, from the poem by Verlaine, Bowles records with great precision and great irony only that the ballet's producer, the Marques de Cuevas, was "an eccentric in the grand tradition," a man who ultimately "did not believe any of what he was saying," and a man by whom Bowles "was royally duped." Thus, Bowles's means of defining himself in these narratives is to be proudly, defiantly, what others are not. Of his wife, Jane's, writing fiction, clearly experienced by Bowles in this text as a threat to his own capabilities as a writer, he emphasizes—with almost childlike wonder—that for Jane, writing was often a painful

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confrontation with herself. He writes, for example, of her difficulty in “constructing” an imaginary bridge for a passage in her novella, *Cataract*:

We talked for a while about the problem, and I confessed my mystification. “Why do you have to *construct* the damn thing?” I demanded. “Why can’t you just say it was there and let it go at that?” She shook her head. “If I don’t know how it was built, I can’t see it,” she answered.

It never occurred to me that such considerations could enter into the act of writing. Perhaps for the first time I had an inkling of what Jane meant when she remarked, as she often did, that writing was “so hard.” (WS, p. 287)

Bowles confesses his “confusion,” not only that writing could be so “difficult” for someone, but that it could also become so conspicuous. This might be Bowles’s most abject defiance of Jane in the autobiography, not simply that writing could be painful for her—*unlike* for himself, he makes clear—but that it could become a subject for discussion. For, if Bowles has learned anything from his childhood, it is that one’s fictions, not unlike one’s thoughts, are matters of the strictest secrecy and confinement. Throughout this autobiography, and this is the perception he held as a child, Bowles insists that the artist is someone who ought to be—who *must* be—inconspicuous. The writer is a criminal, as it were, and not unlike the way Bowles experienced himself through his father as a maker of fictions, this criminal is the child who still harbors secret thoughts and secret notebooks from that father. Moreover, this is the perception of himself that he has most adamantly presented to his reader. “My own conviction,” he writes, “was that the artist, being an enemy of society, for his own good must remain as invisible as possible and certainly should be indistinguishable from the rest of the crowd” (WS, p. 67). The position and aesthetic strategy Bowles has maintained throughout *Without Stopping* is that art and crime are indissolubly linked: the greater the art, “the more drastic the punishment for it.”

It is understandable, then, that Bowles is the most hesitant—the most anxious and therefore ambiguous—in confronting his relationship to his own novels and short stories in *Without Stopping*. He had published four novels and three collections of short stories before the time he wrote this autobiography, yet he refuses to investigate and present to his reader, in any satisfactory way, the interiority of his fictional world during his adult years. No doubt he fears, as the child

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learned to fear, that to admit to a relationship with his fictions will certainly result in their confiscation. Bowles does not mention his writing fiction until late in the autobiography. When he does so, he writes that, "Long ago I had decided that the world was too complex for me ever to be able to write fiction; since I failed to understand life, I would not be able to find a point of reference which the hypothetical reader might have in common with me" (WS, p. 263).

This admission of course is a rhetorical strategy on Bowles's part, one born out of anxiety and thus aversion. What Bowles means to say (and must not say) here is that it is the *reader* of his autobiography who shares nothing with him. Thus he conceals his fictions from the reader by "dismissing" his writing as a gratuitous occupation. "During the five week sea-voyage I wrote a piece for *Holiday* and a short story, 'The Frozen Fields,' which I sent off to *Harper's Bazaar* the day I arrived in Colombo," he characteristically will write (WS, p. 334). "I had finished *The Sheltering Sky* and sent it off to Doubleday," he similarly recalls, wanting his reader to believe that he wrote fiction to satisfy a publisher rather than himself, and that his intentions always were to send off his fictions—get rid of them—not write them. These fictions are, as they were for the child, the most vulnerable part of himself. As this child would feel the urgency to protect himself, thus to minimize and veil the importance of his fictions to the father, Bowles means still to protect this fictional life against a world that he expects to be rejecting and hostile.

Bowles's most deeply felt fear, a fear he can acknowledge neither to himself nor his reader, is that he remains the artist-criminal who, if he is to survive as the child learned to survive, must invent for himself a pose and therefore an aesthetics of deception to keep himself permanently safe and separate from others. Bowles has said that, "Relationships with other people are at best nebulous; their presences keep us from giving form to our life."<sup>11</sup> In *Without Stopping* he has given textual form to his life by shaping this sentiment into an aesthetic—an aesthetic that is deeply situated in the conflict between his desire to speak and represent his life to his reader and his enormous aversion to intimacy with this reader. Bowles's style of functioning with this burden is to attempt to elude his reader by posing, fictionalizing himself behind layers of deception. Yet, for all his attempts to narrativize and conceal himself, Bowles has paradoxically created a cogent and, what is more, an exquisitely intimate representation of his own psychology. In this text, he has permanently sutured deception to the act of autobiographical writing. If deception leads to fiction, as it did for Bowles the child, then

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*Without Stopping* is Bowles's greatest fiction to date, and his greatest fiction of himself.

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This essay is dedicated to the memory of Robert H. Deutsch.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Metcalf, "A Journey in Search of Paul Bowles," *The Review of Contemporary Fiction: Paul Bowles/Coleman Dowell Number* (Elmwood Park, Ill.), 2, No. 7 (Fall 1982), 40.

<sup>2</sup> Gore Vidal, Introduction to *Paul Bowles: Collected Stories 1930-1976* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1979). All references to Bowles's short stories are hereafter cited as *CS*.

<sup>3</sup> Newly retitled as *Paul Bowles, An Autobiography*, *Without Stopping* (New York: Ecco Press, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> I refer here to R. Victoria Arana's use of the term psychoaesthetics. Arana convincingly argues for an aesthetic unique to autobiographical writing in her insightful article, "The Psychoaesthetics of Autobiography" in *biography*, 6, No. 1, pp. 53-67.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 17. All references to *Without Stopping* are hereafter cited as *WS*.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term "structuring absence" here to mean that material in the writer's unconscious that is too painful, fearful, or dangerous to be given expression in the "logical" conscious text. Yet this repressed material paradoxically not only breaks through to erupt into the logical text but more often than not actually *determines* the text's underlying structure. The term comes from the psychoanalytical model of the visible text as a "revision" of the writer's unconscious. For a detailed analysis of this term, see The Editors of *Cahiers du Cinema*, "John Ford's 'Young Mr. Lincoln'" (*Cahiers du Cinema*, No. 223, 1970), who locate in Ford's cinematic text signifiers of such repressed material, adding to this psychoanalytical model Althusser's expression of "the internal shadows of exclusion" in the text. With specific reference to Bowles here, we may say that the unconscious feelings toward the father inform the logical flow and organization of the text, whether or not these feelings are consciously expressed. In short, this text exhibits an aesthetic both consciously and unconsciously determined.

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Stages of Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle," cited in *American Autobiography*, ed. Albert E. Stone (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> If we look further at Bowles's short story, "The Frozen Fields," we see the extent to which he contrasts the anxiety associated with the father to the "safety" of the landscape of his maternal grandparents' farm. Bowles writes (*CS*, p. 262):

Everything connected with the farm was imbued with magic. The house was the nucleus of an enchanted world more real than the world that other people knew about. During the long green summers he had spent there with his mother and the members of her family he had discovered that world and explored it, and none of them had ever noticed that he

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was living in it. But his father's presence here would constitute a grave danger, because it was next to impossible to conceal anything from him, and once aware of the existence of the other world he would spare no pains to destroy it.

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence D. Stewart elaborates on the special relationships between Bowles and Stein in his *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> *The Review of Contemporary Fiction, Paul Bowles/Coleman Dowell Number*, p. 68.

<sup>11</sup> Millicent Dillon, *A Little Original Sin: The Life and Works of Jane Bowles* (New York: Holt, 1981), p. 44.

# Alien Terrain: Paul Bowles's Filial Landscapes

STEVEN E. OLSON

With the exception of James Baldwin, Paul Bowles is perhaps America's most distinguished living expatriate writer. Since 1947 Bowles has lived abroad, primarily in Tangier. Virtually all of his fiction is set abroad, either in North Africa or Central or South America; only three of his thirty-nine short stories are set in the United States. Critics have emphasized Bowles's "foreignness," his fascination with the non-Western mind and remote, often inhuman landscapes. Lawrence Stewart calls North Africa Bowles's "home territory."<sup>1</sup> Gore Vidal claims that the triumph of Bowles's art can be traced to the fact that he laudably ignored "that greatest of all human themes: *The American Experience*. . . . Bowles is still odd man out; he writes as if *Moby Dick* had never been written."<sup>2</sup> Leslie Fiedler comes nearest to identifying Bowles's persistent psychological themes when noting the writer's obsession with "images of alienation, flight, and abysmal fear."<sup>3</sup> Yet Fiedler relegates Bowles to a circle of "minor novelists" writing in the gothic tradition of "highbrow terror-fiction" that runs from Charles Brockden Brown through John Hawkes, ultimately dismissing Bowles as a kind of voyeuristic peddler of "horror-pornography."<sup>4</sup>

Stewart, Vidal, and Fiedler are all equally drawn to three of Bowles's most shocking stories. All three discuss "The Delicate Prey," which depicts castration, torture, and murder. Interestingly, Stewart and Vidal choose that story and two others, "Pages from Cold Point" and "A Distant Episode," for the focal point of their arguments. The latter two stories describe homosexual incest, violence, and madness. While there is no gainsaying that the fictional world of Bowles is often one of violence and aberration, we must recognize that that is but one

aspect of Bowles's imagination. Though they may at times seem gratuitous, the elements of horror in Bowles's writings rarely are. Beneath the violent surfaces of the novels and many of the stories lies a persistent anti-patriarchal stratum that is characteristically American. Indeed, I would argue against Vidal's position, by claiming that Bowles most certainly writes in the Antinomian tradition of the greatest American novelists: he writes, that is, as if *Moby Dick* had been written.

The main source of Bowles's anti-patriarchalism stems clearly from his own childhood, where he met with recurrent humiliations and cruelties from his father.<sup>5</sup> Bowles describes his relationship to his father with characteristic detachment in his autobiography, *Without Stopping*.<sup>6</sup> Bowles's youth was predicated on the "absolute necessity" of winning the struggle with his dentist father, who reportedly had first attempted to kill his only child at the age of six weeks by holding him out an open window on a freezing night. The father, Claude, was a humorless, neurotic parent and husband who ruled his household with "unremitting firmness" (WS, p. 23). Paul early withdrew into the privacy of his own room and imagination to escape his father's despotic presence. Paul, who at the age of five had never spoken to another child nor seen children playing together, early learned to create mind games of his own. He enjoyed being sick because illness constituted a victory over his father:

One night when I [had] a high fever, Daddy stood at the foot of my bed with his hands in his pockets. He said to Mother: "You know, I think he likes to be sick."

"Yes," I thought, "I do. And the best part is, I am sick, and you can't forbid it." (WS, p. 25)

Warfare with his father culminated dangerously when, at the age of nineteen, Bowles discovered in astonishment that he had just thrown a meat knife at his father during dinner. Terror-stricken, Paul fled the house. When his father persuaded Paul to return home but then chastised him for having grieved his mother, the son lashed out: "You can't stand me because every time you look at me you realize what a mess you've made of me! . . . But it's not my fault I'm alive. I didn't ask to be born" (WS, p. 105).

Bowles's fiction is peopled with unhappy Americans who "didn't ask to be born" and who are not particularly happy to be alive. In *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) unhappiness arises in part from "the whole horrible thing that happens after every war, everywhere."<sup>7</sup> The progress of Western civilization is treated even more contemptuously in Bowles's third and finest novel, *The Spider's House* (1955), which dramatizes the

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dissolution of traditional patterns of life in Fez during the Moroccan revolution.<sup>8</sup> Yet Bowles's characters do not derive their unhappiness chiefly from a cultural consciousness nor from the anxiety of living in the Atomic Age. Cultural uprootedness functions nearly always as effect rather than cause in Bowles's fiction. Expatriatism and deracination are by-products of a much deeper alienation, an alienation of self. Security and happiness have not been destroyed by World War II, but have vanished far earlier, in childhood. Bowles's characters are expatriates manqué, individuals who inhabit alien terrains of self. The vertiginous landscapes of Morocco, like those of Central or South America, provide a projected topography of the psychic fissures, cliffs, and abysses formed in a vanished geological age—the age of childhood.

Bowles first depicted the violent failure of a parent-child relationship in "The Echo" (1946). In this early story a college-aged American girl, Aileen, visits her mother, who has recently moved from Washington, D.C., to live in Colombia in a large house perched on the side of a cliff. With the mother lives Prue, a masculine, blue-jeaned artist who is clearly lover as well as housemate. Aileen's neurotic behavior within Bowles's erotically charged landscape reveals the daughter's sexual repression and estrangement from her mother, both of which eventually fuel a savage attack upon Prue. Aileen's mother has insisted that the daughter behave civilly toward Prue because "she's my guest and you're my guest" (CS, p. 57). To reduce one's child to the category of "guest" is a decided act of parental betrayal; Aileen's subsequent outrage, directed at Prue, constitutes a displaced assault upon the mother. More significantly, Aileen's assault represents a child's rebellion against patriarchal authority, for the masculine and aggressive Prue functions as both substitute-father and phallic aggressor. That this is so is made clear by Prue's twisting of Aileen's arm and her flicking of water into Aileen's face on the morning of the daughter's departure. The water-flicking duplicates an earlier incident wherein a male peasant had emptied a mouthful of water into Aileen's face after she had paused in curiosity before his hut. Only by attacking the father-substitute can Aileen, the child, lay claim to a viable identity. Lunging at Prue with "vicious suddenness, kicking, ripping and pounding all at once," Aileen screams, "Nobody! Nobody! Nobody! Nobody can do that to me!" (CS, pp. 62, 63). The daughter's defiant primal scream returns to her, inhumanly echoed from the rock wall on the far side of the gorge. With that, Aileen departs, alienated and alone.

Bowles's most notorious depiction of a perverted parent-child relationship occurs in "Pages from Cold Point" (1947). The story depicts

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the seduction and blackmailing of a father, Mr. Norton, by his sixteen-year-old son, Racky. Less a sordid tale of perversion than a nihilistic allegory of Western civilization, "Pages from Cold Point" dramatizes Bowles's deep hostility to the intelligentsia. Like the Professor in "A Distant Episode," Mr. Norton is a benighted and cynical product of his vocation, university teaching, a career he himself admits had always been "an utter farce." The death of his wife, Hope, has plunged Mr. Norton into a disillusioned hedonism, lived out upon the remote point of a small Caribbean island. "After Hope's death" there is no redemption:

Our civilization is doomed to a short life: its component parts are too heterogeneous. I personally am content to see everything in the process of decay. The bigger the bombs, the quicker it will be done. Life is visually too hideous for one to make the attempt to preserve it. Let it go. Perhaps some day another form of life will come along. Either way, it is of no consequence. (CS, p. 83)

Possibly Mr. Norton's new life form *has* come along. That form, of his own creation, is his son Racky, corruption and hopelessness incarnate.

Written aboard ship as Bowles was Morocco-bound, "Pages from Cold Point" ushers in the major phase of the author's development as a writer of fiction, the period 1949–1955. During this period Bowles published his three most important novels and much of his finest short fiction. The "secret connection between the world of nature and the consciousness of man" (WS, p. 125) which Bowles experienced upon his first view of the North African coast in 1931 finds expression in Port Moresby, the protagonist of *The Sheltering Sky*. Such a connection between nature and consciousness, however, masks a wish for cathartic annihilation rather than ecstatic pleasure. Port's compulsive, ever-deepening journey into the Sahara, that is, masks an obvious death wish. Like Mr. Norton, Port is estranged from humanity and hope; a "glacial deadness" at the core of his being unites him to a nothingness of sand and sky. No "secret connection" between mind and nature is capable of suturing the lesions in Port's psyche which were inflicted earlier in his life by the forces of alienation and loneliness.

Though married twelve years, Porter and Katherine Moresby (clearly modeled on Paul and Jane Bowles) remain "diametrically opposed" in their attitudes toward life. The "silences and emptinesses" that touch Paul's soul simply terrify Kit, whose life centers upon a constant struggle to win a "war between reason and atavism" (SS, p. 44). Port views passion not as a force leading to love or stability, but as a passport to forbidden realms of experience. An early encounter with a

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prostitute outside Oran nearly gets Port killed. And a later attempt to procure a blind dancer further illustrates Port's narcissistic need to absorb other life forms into an otherwise empty self: "without eyes to see beyond the bed, she would have been completely there, a prisoner" (SS, p. 140).

Port's inability to reciprocate love lies at the heart of his failed marriage. During much of the novel, Port and Kit are able to function efficiently only because of the presence of their friend Tunner, who accompanies them on their travels into the Sahara from Oran. Tunner is a literalist "dolt" who provides a needed psychic element. Where Port is all ego (a complete narcissist) and Kit is all id (an oral atavist), Tunner is all super-ego (a moralizing tyrant). By tyrannizing equally over ego and id, Tunner keeps them in check. Aside from his sexual interest in Kit, Tunner's motivation in traveling with the Moresbys is to impose "moral domination" (SS, p. 67). He riddles Port and Kit with guilt over their sexless marriage. Following his seduction of Kit on the train to Bousiff, Tunner's role as super-ego intensifies: he becomes the antagonist who actually forces Port and Kit into a temporarily supportive, though never intimate, relationship.

In the second section of *The Sheltering Sky* Bowles uses the geographically distanced Tunner, who has split up with the Moresbys, as an omnipresent psychic antagonist who propels a now unbalanced ego-and-id ever onward toward death and madness in the Sahara and Sudan. When Tunner leaves the Moresbys, the tripartite psychic constellation becomes irredeemably fractured. Because the super-ego is formed in infancy out of a child's ambivalent attitudes toward the parent of the same sex during the Oedipus complex, Tunner comes to symbolize to Port not simply a rival for his wife's love, but, more importantly, the embodiment of a patriarchal authority. That is to say, Tunner, like Prue in "The Echo," becomes a tyrannical father-substitute who would deny the child an identity of its own. That Tunner comes into possession of Port's "identity" is made clear by the fact that he comes into possession of Port's stolen passport. Tunner arranges to return the passport to Port, but the latter self-destructively refuses to allow this to happen. Rather than receive such a "false" validation of his existence, Port takes flight deeper into the Sahara. Port's motivation for travel changes from that of discovery to that of abject flight. Although Port's flight culminates in his own death and the destruction of his wife's sanity, he does succeed in escaping Tunner-the-father, much as Victor Frankenstein's creature escapes his creator only through a similarly mythic pattern of self-destroying yet self-defining flight.

In *The Sheltering Sky* Bowles voiced what would continue to be the major themes of his fiction: loss, alienation, and flight. To say that these have been the persistent themes of such other male American writers as Cooper, Melville, Twain, Hemingway, and Faulkner is to remove the Bowles canon from the Fiedleresque purlieu of "horror-pornography" and to set it where it more deservedly belongs: in the mainstream of American fiction. In the fiction written after *The Sheltering Sky* Bowles turned more directly toward voicing his themes in terms of "vanished innocence" and lost or destroyed childhoods. In fact, between "The Echo" and "The Frozen Fields" (1946–1957) Bowles displays an increasingly romantic interest in children. Such an interest can also be seen in the works of such contemporaries as Salinger, Kerouac, and, to a lesser extent, Ginsberg. Mark Twain voiced a similar interest following the Civil War.

Bowles's second novel, *Let It Come Down* (1952), again dramatizes the self-destructive flight of an alienated American who travels to Morocco.<sup>9</sup> The thirty-year-old Nelson Dyar is a "nonentity" who leaves his parents' home and his job as a bank teller to come to Tangier, where an old family friend, Jack Wilcox, has agreed to take him on in his travel bureau. Dyar goes to North Africa in an effort to escape the "progressive paralysis" that has been gaining on him for the past ten years of his life. A radical change of environment will, he hopes, deliver him "from the sense of despair that had weighed on him for so long" (*LICD*, p. 22). Such hopes, of course, prove false: in Tangier he feels "exactly the same," Wilcox turns out to be a crook, there is no job, and Dyar himself becomes a thief, murderer, and fugitive. Like Kit Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky*, Nelson Dyar regresses toward an infantile condition of wholeness and self-assertion during the final section of the novel. Unfortunately, both characters are able to experience such wholeness only at the cost of their sanity; both lose the battle between reason and atavism.

Like Port Moresby, Nelson Dyar leads an empty, purposeless existence. As the reliable Daisy de Valverde observes while reading his palm, Dyar's life has no "pattern": "Most people can't help following some kind of design," she remarks. "It's that that saves them. . . . But you're safe from being saved" (*LICD*, p. 34). The absence of design in Dyar's life underscores his role as a naturalistic antihero who lacks the ability to control his own destiny. Dyar is the avatar of Frank Norris' McTeague—a sluggish creature of impulse and appetite whose fate is determined by heredity and environment. Like McTeague, Dyar feeds, sleeps, and copulates, often voraciously but always mechanically. Even

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love for Dyar is measured materialistically: the child prostitute Hadija is preferable to the aging Daisy because her flesh is firmer. As in virtually all of his fiction, Bowles in *Let It Come Down* equates lovemaking with eating. Dyar's lovemaking with Hadija during a picnic is punctuated with sandwich-eating and concludes with sleep. And his majoun-induced ardor over Daisy results in a veritable casserole:

The wine glass went over first . . . plates slid and tumbled toward him as the tray overturned and buried the lower part of his body in a confusion of china, glassware and warm food . . . he scrambled up to be completely near her, so that there were only a few thicknesses of wet cloth, a fork and a spoon or two between them, and presently, after a short struggle with pieces of clinging clothing, nothing but a few creamed mushrooms. (LICD, p. 217)

Just as the catalyst in McTeague's criminal transformation is alcohol, the catalyst in Dyar's decline is a drug—kif or majoun. At the end of both Norris' and Bowles's novels, the hero awaits his doom, alone with a pile of stolen money and a murdered friend. The role of hallucinogenic drugs is central to Bowles's conception of his protagonist, for without drugs Dyar could never have imagined that he had somehow "escaped from his cage" and taken charge of his destiny. Only in a kif-induced euphoria can Dyar experience a feeling of "well being" as he hides from the police on the edge of a cliff in Spanish Morocco.

Whereas Kit Moresby's regression to an infantile state following the death of her husband remains more implied than stated, Bowles emphatically dramatizes Nelson Dyar's backward journey into childhood. The journey begins as soon as Dyar flees by boat from the International Zone to Spanish Morocco with the money he has stolen from his crooked boss, Wilcox. As his Arab friend Thami pilots the boat, Dyar lies on his back in the darkness. Unbidden, memories of childhood nursery rhymes and images of his mother vividly return to him:

he found himself entering a region of his memory which, now that he saw it again, he thought had been lost forever. It began with a song, brought back to him, perhaps, by the motion of the boat, and it was the only song that had ever made him feel really happy. "Go. To sleep. My little pickaninny. Mammy's goin' to slap you if you don't. Hushabye. Rockabye. Mammy's little baby." (LICD, p. 228)

Later, left alone in an isolated shack belonging to Thami's in-laws, Dyar feels caught "like a rat in a trap." Taking Thami's kif and pipe, he embarks upon a sensless and dangerous journey to a nearby village.

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"High as a kite," he journeys downward through a "deceptive landscape" of time as well as of space. This stoned journey carries Dyar back to his childhood school days, when the word *infinity* and thoughts of the future had evoked in him an imponderable and paralyzing weight: "if only existence could be cut down to the pinpoint of here and now, with no echoes reverberating from the past, no tinglings of expectation from time not yet arrived!" (*LICD*, p. 255).

Dyar's existential anxieties are calmed by several more pipe-fulls of kif; his life assumes a holistic "pattern" which anchors him equally to "sunbaked earth" and vanished childhood. Such a vision, however, can only be destructive rather than redemptive, for it has been purchased at the price of sanity. Childhood, that is, has been reclaimed only at the expense of foreclosing what it must usher in—hope:

Always before, he had believed that, although childhood had been left behind, there would still somehow, some day, come the opportunity to finish it in the midst of its own anguished delights. He had awakened one day to find childhood gone—it had come to an end when he was not looking, and its elements remained undefinable, its design nebulous, its harmonies all unresolved. (*LICD*, pp. 255–56)

At this point Dyar is, eponymously, ready to die, for only a death-wish can bring the stasis that his ego so fervently desires.

During the remainder of the day, and particularly with the return of Thami in the evening, Dyar regresses ever deeper into a "lost region" of childhood memories. He exclaims to Thami that he has entered into "another world." That world, as Dyar's murder of Thami makes clear, is the make-believe realm of childhood fantasy. Imagining that he is nailing the door of the shack shut to keep out the wind, Dyar drives a nail into Thami's ear amid a mad roar of childish gibberish:

A mass of words had begun to ferment inside him, and now they bubbled forth. "Many Mabel damn. Molly Daddy lamb. Lolly little Dan. . . . Melly diddle din," he said, quite loud, putting the point of the nail as far into Thami's ear as he could. He raised his right arm and hit the head of the nail with all his might. . . . The nail was as firmly embedded as if it had been driven into a coconut. "Merry Mabel dune." The children were going to make a noise when they came out at recess-time. (*LICD*, p. 284)

When Daisy de Valverde catches up with Dyar the next day, she finds him "behaving like a small child." With her discovery of Thami's body, Daisy must accept her earlier reading of Dyar's palm: he is "safe from being saved." Dyar has finally achieved "a definite status, a precise

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relationship with the rest of men" (*LICD*, p. 292), but he has acquired such self-definition only by stepping over the threshold from despair to madness and self-destruction.

Bowles's interest in depicting childhood memories and parent-child relationships can be discerned elsewhere in *Let It Come Down*, as well as in such stories of the period as "Senor Ong and Senor Ha," "You Are Not I," and "The Hours after Noon." In *Let It Come Down* a clear prototype for a potentially redemptive relationship between an American adult and an Arab child can be found in the minor characters of the grotesquely comic lesbian Eunice Goode and the young prostitute Hadija. Large and ludicrous, Eunice is Dyar's rival for the love of Hadija. Despite her manifest absurdities, however, Eunice possesses a number of virtues: she is outspoken, audacious, a doer rather than a thinker, and, most importantly, she sees in Hadija's innocence a potential anodyne for her own corruption and unhappiness:

As a mainspring for her behavior there was always the aching regret for a vanished innocence, a nostalgia for the early years of life. Whenever a possibility of happiness presented itself, through it she sought to reach again that infinitely distant and tender place, her lost childhood. And in Hadija's simple laughter she divined a prospect of return. (*LICD*, p. 58)

Though fallen, Hadija is not corrupted. She remains a primitive Arab child possessing the capacity to redeem deracinated Westerners—provided that they see the need for redemption and have not grown too cynical or nihilistic to believe that it is possible. Unlike Dyar, Eunice has not altogether lost hope.

The concept of child-as-redeemer which Bowles adumbrates in *Let It Come Down* receives full and tragic expression in his third and most brilliant novel, *The Spider's House* (1955). It seems ironically appropriate that Bowles dedicated the book to his father, for the novel brings together the author's most persistent filial and anti-patriarchal themes concerning the adult betrayal of childhood innocence. Set in Fez during the days of the Moroccan Revolution of August 1954, *The Spider's House* contains effective shifts in point of view which intensify the sense of intrigue and uncertainty generated by political events; the absence of the aberrant or sensational enhances the reality of the characters and their plight; and the superbly rendered portrait of Fez—political, social, religious, domestic—provides a Balzacian richness to the panorama of a city and its people. Though Bowles emphasizes in his preface to the 1982 Black Sparrow Press edition of the book that *The Spider's House* is about the "dissolution" of a medieval way of life in Fez, the poignancy

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of the novel derives more from Bowles's depiction of the timeless tragedy of mankind's fall from innocence.

In a very real sense, it could be said that *The Spider's House* is a parable of the Fall: the seduction of the protagonist John Stenham by the conniving Lee Burroughs brings about corruption and expulsion; an automobile carries the fallen couple away from the now-destroyed purity of Fez to the decadence of Casablanca. Left in the adults' wake is Amar, a fifteen-year-old Moroccan youth trapped between two worlds—worlds as much those of childhood innocence and adult duplicity as the warring worlds of Moslem and European cultures. By deserting Amar, who begs to stay with him, Stenham repudiates that which might save him. The tragic vision of *The Spider's House* relies less upon the historical destruction of medieval Fez than upon the destruction of childhood itself. In effect, Amar is Fez: his childish innocence is synonymous with the city's purity. By dramatizing the dissolution of Amar's private and familial world, Bowles symbolizes the dissolution of the larger culture—the technique is similar to Faulkner's in *The Sound and the Fury*.

*The Spider's House* opens (following a suspenseful prologue introducing John Stenham) as the young Amar resignedly returns home to be beaten by his father. The precise nature of Amar's crime remains murky; we know little more than that his older brother Mustapha has seen him in a "forbidden" area of Fez. Mustapha tries unsuccessfully to blackmail Amar, threatening to report him to their father, Sri Driss, if Amar does not pay. Amar knows that he will be beaten by his father if reported. He does not fear the pain of such beating, but resents its *injustice*: "what was unbearable was the thought that he was innocent and that he was going to be humiliated by being treated as though he were guilty" (*SH*, p. 16). From Amar's thoughts, we can infer that he is actually innocent of the crime which Sri Driss accuses him of—stealing the household money needed for food to spend on himself in the forbidden European quarter of the city. Amar, however, is no thief. It seems likely that Mustapha himself stole the money for his kif habit, knowing that circumstantial evidence (Amar's being away from home for several days) would condemn the younger brother.

The injustice of Sri Driss's beating of Amar certainly owes much to Bowles's own memories of being arbitrarily and unfairly punished as a child. Indeed, Amar's entire relationship with his father recalls Bowles's relationship with his own. Locked into a protracted struggle with a patriarchal tyrant, the imaginative son knows that he can attain victory

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only through a creatively active "hostile silence." As Sri Driss mercilessly beats Amar with the buckle-end of a belt, screaming "I hope I kill you!" the son silently ponders whether it is "a consuming hatred or an overpowering love" that he feels for his father (SH, p. 24). Amar respects his father's unwavering sense of duty, yet at the same time he recognizes an unbridgeable gap between their two worlds. As the son of a Cherif, or descendant of the Prophet, Amar, like Sri Driss, possesses the *baraka*—the gift of healing. The son's power, however, unlike the father's, is derived from the spirit rather than the letter of the Koran. Sri Driss's world is static and dead. The father has no understanding or intuition of his son's private nature, which perceives a living world of constant revelation. A visionary romantic, Amar is the Blakean or Emersonian poet-sayer, the artist who perceives the miraculous in the mundane:

The thought that his own conception of the world was so different from his father's was like a protecting wall around his entire being. When his father went out into the street he had only the mosque, the Koran, the other old men in his mind. It was the immutable world of law, the written law, the written word, unchanging beneficence. . . . Whereas when Amar stepped out the door there was the whole vast earth waiting, the live, mysterious earth, that belonged to him in a way it could belong to no one else, and where anything might happen. (SH, p. 29)

Amar, we will soon learn, is the opposite of the American Stenham, the rationally detached and introverted novelist whose powers are failing him.

Amar's innocence rests upon the integrity of his imagination, which daily re-creates the world. Uneducated and illiterate by choice, constantly spinning fantasies, Amar is considered "crazy" by his friends. For his part, Amar takes great pride in being different—it signifies to him his status as one of the Chorfa—he possesses a benevolent strain of the Hawthornesque ability of knowing "what [is] in the hearts of other men" (SH, p. 88). Amar's father has come to regret his decision to let his son remain out of school; consequently, there is a constant struggle at home to force Amar to work. Because a Cherif does not work in any ordinary sense of the term, Sri Driss's efforts to apprentice his son constitute efforts to destroy the son's gifts. Like Claude Bowles, the pleasure-hating father is committed to ending his son's childhood. Catching Amar outside the house several days after beating him, he orders his son to prepare for a job interview as a potter's assistant: "This

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is not a world just to go for a walk in. You're a man, not a boy any longer" (*SH*, p. 35).

Like Port Moresby and Nelson Dyar, John Stenham inhabits a cage of self. In Fez, he dwells appropriately in the *tower* of the Merenides Palace hotel. His forced descent from that tower by the intrusion of political events thrusts him into an unwanted and unwonted arena of moral choice. Only once before did Stenham face a similar dilemma of choosing sides—when he chose to join the Communist Party in the Thirties. That choice—the wrong one—has paralyzed “the part of his consciousness which dealt with the choosing of sides” (*SH*, p. 342), even though he resigned from the Party in 1940. Stenham opposes both French occupation of Morocco and a Nationalist victory. He would prefer that time stand still, that Fez remain somnolently medieval and pure so that he might continue to write without disturbance in his tower. Bowles will not leave his hero alone, of course. Stenham will be able to avoid making a political choice, but he will face a much tougher choice, a moral one: he will have to choose between Amar and an American woman, Lee Burroughs. For the second consecutive time, Stenham makes the wrong choice. In choosing Lee Burroughs over Amar, Stenham chooses badly: he chooses evil over goodness, death over life. To read the novel in any other light, I believe strongly, is to misread Bowles's intention. Amar possesses the key that can unlock Stenham's cage, perhaps even freeing his creative energies as a writer. Stenham, however, chooses a woman he neither loves nor really admires—he locks himself into a yet smaller and more constrictive cage. Clearly, Bowles is commenting upon his own decision to live unfettered in Tangier, where few if any restraints were imposed upon his aesthetic choices.

To minimize or disregard Lee Burroughs' corrupt vacuity is to misread *The Spider's House*. A joyless and mannequin-like bitch, Lee "had become an adult early" following the deaths of her parents in a plane crash. A former worker for UNESCO, she spouts the empty rhetoric of progressivism while valuing human life only in the abstract. Indeed, her Dorothea Brooke-like concern for a whipped carriage horse during her initial outing with Stenham surpasses any concern she ever exhibits for specific Moroccans. Enraged at Stenham's praise for Amar's ability to see "an untainted world" during the festival of Aïd el Kebir, Lee gives the boy money for a revolver. Her motives in doing so, lamely justified on the grounds of pushing Amar into the struggle for Moroccan independence, are completely selfish and irrational—she is attempting only to punish Stenham by destroying Amar, someone he

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has come to care for and admire. Stenham tells Lee that "there's a four-letter word" for her potentially tragic action (*SH*, p. 350).

Only by separating Stenham from Amar can Lee succeed in seducing him. The adversarial relationship which had existed during the festival heretofore had depended upon Amar's proximity to Stenham, for the youth's Islamic gift of *baraka* had provided Stenham with some insight into the substance of Lee's moral corruption. Lee "doesn't know anything about the world," Amar tells his American benefactor; "she wants to be something powerful" (*SH*, pp. 328-29). Whereas Amar's friend Mohammed denounces Lee for failing to behave chastely, Amar criticizes her for nothing less than her hubris—her arrogance and pride. Rather than surrender to the world, Lee would see it changed, made over in some ephemeral image of man. As such, Lee is the spider who, according to the Koran, builds "the frailest of all houses." Into that house, from his tower, Stenham descends.

From the moment of having first met Amar at the Café Berakne, where the boy was standing in a pool trying to rescue a dragonfly, Stenham's complacently insular conception of Moroccan life became challenged: "Moroccans just don't do things like that," he tells Lee (*SH*, p. 251). Subsequently, when he sees Amar cry with emotion over the beauty of a woman's song at the feast of the Aïd, his convictions are further undermined. Amar, that is, has violated what Stenham always unquestionably assumed: that for a Moroccan "to be touched by beauty was shameful" (*SH*, p. 335). Though Amar hurriedly checks his emotional response so that his companion Mohammed will not notice it, his spontaneous outburst has a profoundly disturbing effect upon Stenham. Until this moment the American writer has never conceived Moroccans to exist except as a faceless aggregate:

But now, perhaps as a result of having seen this boy, he found himself beginning to doubt the correctness of his whole theoretical edifice . . . that such a person as Amar could be produced by this society rather upset Stenham's calculations . . . if there were one Amar, there could be others. (*SH*, p. 336)

Amar's intrusion into Stenham's world approaches a moment of what Mircea Eliade terms *hierophany*, a manifestation of the sacred in everyday life. In Amar's company, Stenham is challenged to renounce or question his nihilistic cynicism. Less an agent than a potential catalyst for Stenham's redemption, however, Amar proves to be no match for Lee Burroughs' duplicity or Stenham's own moral spinelessness. Having stood at the brink of a revelatory instant, Stenham defers further epiphanies: "it required too much effort to go on from there" (*SH*, p. 346)

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337). He returns to Lee. The knight has turned away from the Chapel Perilous.

Once returned to Fez, Amar becomes dangerously embroiled in the accelerating events of the Revolution. He cannot return to his house to ascertain the safety of his family, but must seek refuge with the Nationalist Moulay Ali and his band of Istiqlal youths, members of the "Friends of Freedom." When finally able to escape Moulay Ali's house after a raid, Amar finds himself "cut off from his home." He seeks the American stranger Stenham, "whose existence in the world meant the possibility of hope" (*SH*, pp. 374, 393). Stenham, who has tousled Amar's hair as well as fed and protected him, represents the affectional father the child needs. Unlike Sri Driss and others, Stenham has never sought to impose rules or dictate behavior, nor has he been judgmental toward Amar. Such shared characteristics as a distaste for hedonism and a distrust of knowledge gained solely through the intellect bond Stenham and Amar together.

Following a number of risks and dangers, Amar succeeds in locating Stenham in Fez's Ville Nouvelle. By this time the Moroccan youth is faint and dizzy:

He saw his friend in the doorway, his arm raised in a gesture of welcome; then a cloud came swiftly across the sun and the street shot into its dark shadow. He leaned against one of the small dead trees to keep from falling. . . . But then the Nazarene was at his side, leading him into the cool shade of the hotel . . . he was happy. Nothing mattered, nothing terrible could happen to him when he was in this man's care. (*SH*, p. 402)

Amar's belief that "now everything is well" proves, of course, to be wrong, for Stenham and Lee Burroughs (the evidence of their intimacy displayed in smears of lipstick and odors of perfume) are fleeing Fez for Casablanca. With his world in ruins around him, Amar wants only to be with Stenham. Under a ruse that he intends to visit his mother in Meknes, Amar rides into the hills beyond Fez with Stenham and Lee. There, Stenham orders him from the car. As the car resumes speed, Amar runs after it in the hot tar, his sandals kicked aside: "he had the exultant feeling of flying along the road behind the car. It would surely stop. . . . He ran on. When he got to the curve the road was empty" (*SH* p. 406). Like Sal Paradise's auto-desertion of Dean Moriarty at the end of *On the Road*, Stenham's desertion of Amar symbolizes both betrayal and an irremediable fall from grace for the protagonist and a stinging indictment of fathers who rob their sons of happiness.

That Bowles's imagination was deeply moved by the writing of *The*

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*Spider's House* can be measured by the first story he published after the novel appeared, "The Frozen Fields" (1957). One of only a handful of stories set in America, "The Frozen Fields" makes explicit what is only implicit in *The Spider's House*: an abused son wishes his father dead. Bowles's story, similar to Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow," recounts an otherwise idyllic family Christmas rendered nightmarish by the neurotic and tyrannical behavior of a parent. (In the Aiken story, however, the suspect parent is mother rather than father.) In the Bowles story, Donald, a highly sensitive and imaginative boy approaching his seventh birthday, is forced to bear the unwarranted humiliations and cruelties visited upon him by his father, Owen, a destroyer of all magic, privacy, and delight. Owen is hated and despised by all who know him. He tyrannizes over both his wife and his son, causing another character, Uncle Ivor, to comment that "it would have been better for everybody if he'd stayed single" (CS, p. 273). Donald's father's raging insecurity explodes in an attack upon his son, who has received many expensive gifts from the wealthy Mr. Gordon, a sexually suspect character. Despite his possible societally condemned propensities, Mr. Gordon is a compassionate and affectional father-figure for Donald. The older man understands Donald's feelings. In giving him gifts, he relives and cherishes his own childhood.

Donald's father, Owen, is about to have a heart attack over his rage at Mr. Gordon's unsolicited largesse toward his son. Owen corners his son in the henhouse, insisting that he and Donald have a snowball-throwing contest, the target to be the trunk of a large tree at the edge of the woods. Because he has dreamed about a large wolf who has seized his father by the throat and carried him off, however, Donald is afraid to throw snowballs into the woods. Enraged at this act of filial disobedience, the father rubs snow into his son's face; for good measure, he also shoves some snow down Donald's neck.

In a state bordering on detachment and coma, Donald endures his unjust punishment, much as Amar endured the injustice of his beating by Sri Driss. Bowles's description of Mr. Gordon's departure from the family farm makes the meaning of Donald's punishment clear. Wearing a "thick beaver collar" and "heavy fur gloves," Mr. Gordon is the wolf of vengeance lurking in the woods. Kind and powerful, the wolf is Donald's imagined protector against parental tyranny. As Donald falls asleep after Mr. Gordon's departure, he dreams of the wolf falling asleep in his lap: "Donald leaned over and buried his face in the shaggy fur of his scruff. After a while they both got up and began to run together, faster and faster, across the fields" (CS, p. 276).

As lost son in pursuit of affectional and protective father, Donald duplicates Amar's pursuit of Stenham at the end of *The Spider's House*. Moreover, "The Frozen Fields" anticipates Bowles's depiction of parricide in *Up above the World* (1967). Bowles's persistent themes of familial and filial discord, traceable to his own childhood, are decidedly within the mainstream of American fiction. As such, his reputation stands in need of reassessment. After all, American literature has no nuclear families to speak of (except perhaps in the South). In the rare instances where a parent does exist, he or she tends to be savage, misanthropic, or despotic. Consider Irving's Dame Van Winkle, Huck Finn's Pap, James's Mrs. Newsome, and Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen. Captain Ahab and Willy Loman have hardly served as exemplary father-models either. Even Melville's Mrs. Glendinning becomes enemy and parental victim/tyrant when she forces her prodigal son Pierre to opt for annihilation in the world rather than suspect happiness at home.

Adult protagonists in American literature have generally been so severely scarred in childhood or adolescence that their very survival poses a threat to themselves and those around them. Bowles's characters share with those of Faulkner, Farrell, Aiken, Fitzgerald, O'Neill, and Dreiser a crippling familial past. Although his landscapes are exotic and his more familiar scenes shocking, Paul Bowles writes generally of the country within—the *topos* of promise betrayed, childhood destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), p. xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bowles, *Collected Stories 1939–1976* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1983), pp. 5–6. Page numbers in the text will be preceded by CS.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1969), p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 510.

<sup>5</sup> For my understanding of the centrality of the filial theme in American fiction, I am indebted to Jay Fliegelman's *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972). Page numbers in the text will be preceded by WS.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky* (New York: Ecco Press, 1978), p. 15. Page numbers in the text will be preceded by SS.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Spider's House* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1982). Page numbers in the text will be preceded by SH.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bowles, *Let It Come Down* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980). Page numbers in the text will be preceded by LICD.

# Paul Bowles as Poet: Excursions of a Minimal Anti-self

EDWARD BUTSCHER

*. . . we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream—till the heart be touched.*

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

Like Hemingway, Faulkner, and countless other talented fiction writers, Paul Bowles began his career as a poet but, unlike them, never completely abandoned the form. In 1981, Black Sparrow Press published *Next to Nothing: Collected Poems 1926–1977*, a modest collection (seventy-seven pages) of all the poems he wished to preserve.<sup>1</sup> The slightness of the gathering intimates a curious amalgamation of arrogance and unpoetic diffidence, as well as a compulsive tidiness of erecting barriers against tidal waves of habitual despair. None of the poems are careless or awkward; most of them seem more than competent; a few are quite potent in their endeavors to snare the desolate spasms of an imagination never free of either depression or death threats, a sense of menace so pervasive as to echo (in a cultivated undertone) Poe's Romantic hysteria.

Yeats, whose main spiritual ancestor was Blake, envisioned the creative process as a means for limning the lineaments of another self, the "anti-self" buried in every psyche, which necessarily implies mythic and mystical extensions of the performing self beyond time, mortal bounds.<sup>2</sup> This tends to approximate an instinctive survival operation. The poet's obverse reflection is abstracted into a permanent mask and artifice, which has, in its symbolic aspect, linguistic links with Jacques

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Lacan's notion of a "mirror stage" in the ego's psychosexual development—as with Poe, the mind revealed by Bowles's verses appears frozen at the threshold of adolescence. Language is thus a mirror for a self-symbolizing consciousness as it labors to distinguish awareness of self from phenomena, paradoxically transcending the animistic phase most important to a poet's metaphoric exploration of exterior stimuli.

In the case of outsider Bowles, homosexual and voluntary exile, reversals prevail. The aesthetic machinery behind his poetry generates abnegation, masochistic self-effacement, a relentless, passive dwelling on imminent doom that seems to run counter to literature's generic survival and identity quests. Whatever features of an anti-self that are espied in the dark looking-glass of his fluent verses reify fragments of helpless anguish tottering on the brink of invisibility. Under the circumstances, emotive intensity, which remains a major yardstick for measuring lyric efficacy, is difficult to attain, but the obdurate stress on negative visions does accomplish necessary defensive postures, becomes a species of passive aggressiveness that exerts a positive salvational effect in the end. Narcissism's usual excesses are inverted, and nihilistic victimhood often turns sadistic, forging another weapon in art's perpetual war against mind and nature.

Leslie Fiedler has labeled Bowles's fictions the products of a "high brow terrorist," a label that might categorize the poetry too at times, though the poetic act permits fewer evasions, fewer self-deceptions, however faint the persona or intent upon fashioning an antithetical mask.<sup>3</sup> Before examining the corpus as a whole, it may be valuable to consider first the two poems—their composition dates separated by fifty-one years—chosen to open and close *Next to Nothing*. In spite of a chronological scheme and attesting to Bowles's care, as well as to his craft's singular lack of evolution, the volume projects a definite sequential quality. The initial poem, "Serenade au Cap," flows with a descriptive ease (abetted by absent punctuations) that both belies and yet underscores its ominous climax:

A complete silence wafts down across the wet terraces and moist petals

Wrinkle and fall the little diamond lights by the sea in a long  
Curving line glimmer twinkle shiver on the brink of a grey  
eternity

The pool is still with warm dark water the masses of froth do not move

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A dark form impenetrable silent in the fast twilight hugs the hot earth  
Close to its face

Sex and death have been effectively merged in a crepuscular union at shore's civilized edge as the central personification—night as an "impenetrable silent" face—conveys a mood of quiet acceptance. "Eternity" is the sole abstraction present.

Written four years after the publication of *The Waste Land*, "Serenade au Cap" is in obvious accord with Eliot's psychological set (*sans* his religious drive), although Bowles's sky tokens a vague visage, not Prufrock's etherized patient. There is, to be sure, little tension in the Bowles poem, where the relaxed sensuality of the experience, hinting at oral sex, descends with marvelous control, linguistic and spatial, into the image of a disappearing face, at least little tension beyond that evoked by the suggestion of menace in "dark form."

Compare this to "Nights," the book's fretful finale:

There have been times, what with this and that  
when the whisper of words was not enough.

On some shelf of memory lies a misplaced summer,  
one not stored away for later savoring.  
Surely it ended early, with unexpected fogs,  
with the wind sliding past through unmeasured darkness.

No voice could be enough, what with this and that,  
and the hours falling faster.

Negatives orchestrate the modest score, as they do throughout the collection, but the pace has quickened, has been broken by punctuation marks into more blatant parenthetical phrases and stanzas. The voice is also more conversational.

Technically, Bowles's command is no less adroit, alliterations used to help vary the gait, so that the second stanza, where the poem's single metaphor has its matrix, contrasts in lyric smoothness to the bracketing stanzas' less "poetic" speech. More important, a mystery, both banal ("this and that") and nostalgic ("a misplaced summer"), organizes content around a pellucid yoking of night and death in the realm of anxious old age: "the hours falling faster." A pervasive sense of rue, which is gently touching, stems from the inference of love's terminal inadequacy, fused with the tentative inadequacy of art itself ("words") when confronted by "unmeasured darkness." Instead of striving vainly to protest the inescapable "dying of the light," as Dylan Thomas advised his father, the speaker in "Nights" stays true to its author's bleak

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vantage. He is content to build his perfect mousetrap of a poem with serene restraint, an exercise in courage at variance with the Romantic tradition nurturing Western modernism, but courageous nevertheless. As fastidious bookends for his entire poetic oeuvre, regardless of minor differences, "Serenade au Cap" and "Nights" document the bedrock strength and severe, self-circumscribed borders of Bowles's aesthetic stance. There are no metaphysical escape clauses.

Other facets of his intransigent negativism, which courts an avant-garde neoclassicism amid experimental flourishes and appears, at bottom, a neurotic response to fierce existential dreads and guilts—a sort of minimalist survival dynamic—surface repeatedly in *Next to Nothing*, which should be read in conjunction with Bowles's candid autobiography, *Without Stopping*.<sup>4</sup> The latter's understated portrait of the artist depicts a lonely, sensitive, precocious only child racked by parental extremes, a doting mother and a tyrannical father, whose philosophy was that a child should be forced to do what it does not want to do, since frustration and fear best prepare him for the real world. Pathology threatened, and the nascent ego instinctively devised various defense mechanisms, among them, "the practice of deceit, at least insofar as general mien and facial expressions were concerned" (WS, p. 17) and learning from his mother "how to put his mind into a blank state, as if he were clearing a well of water and letting the water come up fresh,"<sup>5</sup> to the anhedonic point where he thought of himself as "a registering consciousness and no more" (WS, p. 52).

By age fifteen, he had published a story in his high school's literary magazine about a son's suicide and the subsequent punishment of his father, who is drawn into the abyss where the son perished. Decades later, Bowles remembered the deep emotions stirred up by the experience: "My heart beat much too fast. I thought I was committing some crime by writing it."<sup>6</sup> After graduation and several months at an art school, he entered the University of Virginia, Poe's alma mater, where he discovered that a literal release from his father's claws did not entail genuine liberation, that paternal strictures had been internalized, since his anti-Establishment activities and increased feeling of physical well-being were "unfortunately more than offset by a steadily increasing sensation of guilt."<sup>7</sup> A psychic crisis ensued. Returning to his room after a twilight walk, he realized

at once, although I had no idea of what it was going to be, that I was about to do something explosive and irrevocable. It occurred to me that this meant that I was not the I I thought I was or, rather, that there was a second I in me who had suddenly

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assumed control. I shut the door and gave a running leap onto the bed, where I stood, my heart pounding. I took out a quarter and tossed it spinning into the air, so that it landed on my palm. Heads. I cried out with relief and jumped up and down on the mattress several times before landing on the floor. Tails would have meant that I would have had to take a bottle of Allonal that night and leave no note. But heads meant that I would leave for Europe as soon as possible. (WS, pp. 78–79).

A trip to Paris without his parents' knowledge was the immediate outcome of this unique version of Russian roulette—a symbolic suicide or shedding of a former self can suffice in the hagiographies of artist sinners—followed by other wanderings and convenient marriage, in 1938, to Jane Auer, his reflected image, a talented, bisexual author with serious mental problems. Eventually, by the 1940s, he settled into permanent expatriatism in Tangier, Morocco, where he still resides. The crude psychological profile traced by these fragments of autobiography sketches a fairly classic borderline personality, one undergoing a dramatic conversion trauma in which an unresolved identity crisis relieves internal pressures through the adoption of an alternate, oppositional mask, a flesh and blood anti-self.<sup>8</sup> *Without Stopping* records several instances of schizophrenic dissociation, which is often the creative ego's last-resort defense against mounting family romance tensions. One such incident involved a walk to a neighborhood ice cream parlor for the prepubic Bowles that abruptly threw him into another dimension: "As I pushed open the screen door, something happened to me. The best way of describing it is to say that the connection between me and my body was instantaneously severed" (WS, p. 59).

Involuntary dissociation was accompanied by an inner imperative that prevented him from reaching the fountain to make his purchase. Instead, he felt impelled to walk back out the door and repeat the operation. Three times (magic number), he enacted the same ritual and thought himself condemned to pursue his circular route forever. Note that his robot-like repetition compulsion was keeping him from obtaining an oral pleasure. Significantly, it was the sight of his parents' automobile coming down the road that snapped him out of his obsessive trance. The ego split here and elsewhere in Bowles's narrative, the later suicidal gamble, the tenacious angst and guilt and their attendant deceptions, all indicate that flight—from paternal America into art's maternal sanctuary—was an essential maneuver for a psyche in danger of disintegration. Survival is the master plan. However else it might be

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described, literature's organic thrust is against oblivion, generally taking the form, albeit disguised, of an identity quest, a brave effort to complete the ego integration frustrated at an early (narcissistic) stage by factors beyond the embryonic self's control.

This does not mean that poetry can or should be reduced to a symptom chart for recording the etiological origins of a poet's neurosis. But an awareness of the biographical background and interior realities governing his imagination helps explicate the specific dynamic that made Bowles the *kind* of poet he is. It illuminates fertile links between neurotic reaction formations and the minimalist anti-self at the base of every poem he ever wrote, while also spotlighting why his aesthetic tactics could not, did not result in a major expression—his wife's biographer observes: "Paul had learned to disguise his wanting, learned not to want to want."<sup>9</sup> In order for a literary performance to metamorphose craft and lyric sensibility into the abstract, universal package of emotional history that Suzanne Langer has brilliantly isolated as the artifice's unique goal and gift, it must emanate from a psyche capable of converting and bypassing inhibitory defense mechanisms, of creating an anti-self authentically whole and authentically antipathetic to its fractured generator ego.

Bowles might not argue, since, as the very title of his collection insists, he apparently harbors few illusions anent the capacity of the imagination to alter or breach the walls erected around human aspirations by amoral nature, whether interior and past or exterior and present. The next nine poems after "Serenade au Cap" in *Next to Nothing* date from 1927 and evidence a considerable variety of approaches and geography. In "Elegy," where readers could assume an intense wrestle with grief eventuating in some manner of earned consolation, defeatism undercuts formal expectations from the start—"Everything is too late"—although a more conventional resolution proffers physical love as desperate antidote for poisonous reality:

Hold your head thus  
And submit to my soft hands  
It is the only way out  
We are all too late.

It is a pat romantic solution, of course, partially explained by Bowles's youth, late teens, at the time.

The briefer "America" can be quoted in full to exemplify methodological habits and the fashion in which his imagination transmutes a panic-stricken flight abroad into political parable,

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underlining his dependence upon place details—in this case, a room in a Southern clime—to convey states of mind:

The ribbed glass chambers where we live  
 Our voluntary crystal shells  
 Who is there here to complain?  
 The white light of our flimsy prison  
 Where we all lie languidly on taupe matting  
 Hearing the scraping of dry fronds at the screen  
 Where no insect flies nor scaly serpent moves  
 The satin coverlets on our beds  
 The rows of bottles with brittle stoppers  
 Our windows with tiny panes  
 Who is there to rebel?

Questions dominate, rhetorical and real, a sign of foundational insecurity as vicarious consciousness and poesy conspire to situate poet and editorial plural inside inertia's self-constructed cell, reminiscent, at the figurative level, of Henry James's grasp of the very human tendency to rear invisible cages around our options, our lives. Similarly, in "The Church," which has an English setting and distinctly literary air, the thematic crux is a yearning for lost meanings, the empty, ancient church reminding the speaker that they "all knew Rimsky-Korsakoff in those days / And they all wanted Mendelssohn's Wedding March." Absent marriage rituals, a Romantic heritage, are contrasted with nature's more durable, if ambivalent, procession, "weeds and cool beds of mint behind the church," but the poem's turning point merges edifice and Thomas Hood, a neglected minor Victorian, to mock a folk song's archaic defiance of mortality: "O fill my glass / Refill it / Hood was / Not an / Import / Ant / Man."<sup>10</sup>

Of greater impact and complexity is "Double Exposure," which boasts a Scottish locale—despite a remorseless place emphasis, Bowles is frequently loathe to particularize his tourist snapshots—and an unusually energetic evocation of supernatural legacies:

The icy face of Macdougal appears above the trees  
 Above the roar of winter wind unobstructed in the forest  
 Hears the squeal the cold squeal of unnatural things.

The dual layer of experience (in a self-portrait that never concedes an "I" plinth) culminates in the notion that the satanic persistence of a mythic winter visage, echoing night's metaphoric face and identity anxiety in "Serenade au Cap," certifies a divided psyche's perennial condition, Keats's "negative capability" turned inside out:

Let him reign in his icy realm above the trees in the forest  
 Hears that he who utters paradoxes betrays himself

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Hears that low psychic moaning without reason in the trees  
 Hears that at night he will not disappear

That final "he" can refer to Macdougal and persona (unattached pronouns are a favorite device) to double the reflexive burden.

With "Spire Song," sectioned into six parts, a rural scene and unseen steeple anchor a quite traditional lyric concert, measured by standard punctuations and anticipated line breaks, plus another set of "high serious" inquiries. The first section establishes landscape and *modus operandi*:

When in between the rows of corn  
 the heated beetle pants  
 on a faroff hill the peasant is lunching.  
 But we are still waiting by the corn.  
 But we are still waiting by the edge of the field.  
 When in between the sunlit pebbles  
 my summer melody rebounds  
 can you still smell the rot of last year's crop?

Pastoral posture is in ascendancy, though familiar knowledge of mutability haunts and challenges vivid summer images. A fiercer tension, also traditional, suitably so, between customary death obsession and contrapuntal rioting of sylvan creativity scores the second section:

A clear blue radiance will spread out from my heart  
 into this great valley.  
 I shall lean on a pillar of amethyst  
 and sing clear blue tones before water.

The chords could be mistaken for Wordsworth's sublime assumption of divinity. Bowles dearly wants to be able to don the sacerdotal mantle of troubadour, which violates his modernist vantage above old battle zones of contending emotional extremes, because he is in hot pursuit of nothing less than a love poem's mystic, sensual denial of rationality's glacial sway: "A silent curtain is softening about us, / it is only my song."

The penultimate section retreats into a persuasive catalog of rural details that erases doubt from the picture for the sacramental moment—no questions are posed—when consummation nears, asserting magical control over ordinary objects, a transformation of experiential data into the muffled union of lovers: "The screendoors are open / and the boards of porches do not creak. / Soft noises, rounded sounds roll out." Language hushes the quotidian. The coda section (a two-line query) rephrases what every lover wants to ask descending darkness: "Cannot a gushing out of night / be dew on slanting spears of grass?" Ejaculation, instinctual leap into procreative

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immortality, momentary shattering and contradictory intensifying of the self's coffin husk, has brought about a temporary escape from the mind's auto-cannibalism. But the interrogative formula signals a reversion to Romanticism's pathetic fallacy as well, sadly recognized as such.

None of the other efforts from 1927 match the effectiveness or ambitiousness of "Spire Song," though "Entity," a dense prose poem, conflates antipodal tides. It manages to blend the inherent, now discredited urge to build steeples of faith with a crucifixion motif that epitomizes Bowles's agonized oscillations between vanished certainties and paralyzing skepticism: "When all shall have been immersed in brass, it will be easily recognized. Only then will the grain of the pelt be held by fundamental hands. The only tense is the future and futility is taken for granted."

The strategic last poem in the 1927 group, "Here I Am," represents a sort of declaration of intent, Lutheran firm, for the anti-self's passive campaign against dissolution, embodying a litany of acceptance—"Let me not think ever"—at the perimeter of negation that prays humility into aggression for survival's sake: "That is the way I always have felt." It is not much of a poem but probably could not be otherwise in view of its reductionist procedure, which seems deliberately to emulate and parody Whitman's celebration of the miracles of the ordinary—Bowles's verses repeatedly deteriorate into affirmative lists, as if touchstones of normality could in themselves rescue him from the abyss where his father had shoved him.

Of the five poems assigned a 1928 composition date, "The Path to the Pond" has the most dramatic structure and drive. It treats a very dangerous subject—a woman's suicide—with mixed empathy, derision, and sorrow, which replicates, perhaps unavoidably, what a threatened self must configure inside the brutal reflex prisms language construes when imagining reality. The first stanza tries to snare the dead woman's thoughts in the moments before the plunge into nothingness, a childish wish to see the faces, the reactions of "them" when they discover her deed. But the second stanza shifts into a persona's voice, chiding her for hesitating, sick with fear, "because she'd planned to do the thing for days." A final stanza, ostensibly anticlimactic, achieves astonishing power and symbolic resonance:

The lily pads are torn where she went through  
and floating near the dam they found a shoe.  
Her death was slow.

She knew no swifter ways.

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Iambic undulations and complementary rhyme scheme support an intentionally old-fashioned lament modality, adding dignity to poem and topic while confirming Bowles's casual, precocious virtuosity.

A sly change of pace and tone marked the earlier "Blessed Are the Meek," which sardonically rebels against man's victories over nature by utilizing industrial imagery to reinterpret a forest and Christ's message. It concludes with sarcasm: "Every smokestack in the wilderness is covered with night rain / We have ice god and I." And in "Prelude and Dance," a poem that illustrates Bowles's version of avant-garde poetics as an idiosyncratic melding of William Carlos Williams' harsh naturalism, E. E. Cummings' whimsy (grammatical and perceptual), and Lola Ridge's reformist radicalism, a rosary of prayer-like parallels—"Where the forest white brook are / Where the wood white shadow are"—appears to summon up Wallace Stevens, at least his idea of a secular metaphysic allegorized in a singing woman encountered on a Florida shore: "There I saw her slip between the trees and vanish / While a tone still floated in the air."

The end piece in the 1928 series, "Slow Song," has the same antique charm and muse of adoration:

There will be a time not too remotely moonward  
nor yet as reminiscent of the moon's disgrace  
as the bright pastures in the moonlight of your singing  
or the moon's inverted canticle upon your face  
when daylight over meadows and the strokes on bells  
sent outward into sunlight to the banks of streams  
will settle gratefully onto the heavy grass

will rout no more the owl in moonward dreams

Experimental gestures aside, this has the *feel* of a nineteenth-century hymn to beauty and primitive incantations, is almost sentimentally wishful, though Bowles's "Song" of 1929 attempts to roughen the abandoned genre's Pre-Raphaelite surface with contemporary attitudes:

You will be slaves in a castle.  
For every kiss there will be a snicker.  
For every bottle there will be a pupil.  
We are free and can climb mountains,  
But for every passport there is an entrance  
And for every flake there is a drop.  
Grains of former mosaics haunted us  
And for every shred there was a sob  
And for every stab there was a silence.  
For all our freedom we had been chained,

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But for every laugh there had been a caress!  
But for every love there had been a smile.

Self-imprisonment is once more the issue, historic allusions alternating with a chanting invocation of a guru's truisms in a "stab"—key action for Bowles as metaphor and sadistic shock strategy—at accentuating (without resolving) the paradoxes of individual and social existence. Polarities dictate tone and means, replacing the assurance that would have manipulated this type of simple lyric exercise in the recent past. In fact, at this juncture in his young career, Bowles was patently obsessed by a need to rewrite and possibly revalidate poetic formulas he deemed obsolete, another manifestation of the symptomatic contradictions underlying the cynical weariness of his anti-self's characteristic voice. It was an exciting but difficult period for him, serving an apprenticeship under Aaron Copland and absorbing the pioneering linguistic defoliations of Gertrude Stein, "who told him he was not a poet and who encouraged him to work on his music."<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, "Song" does lead into an affirmation, admittedly limited, of life's sweeter side, although the rest of the 1929 entries reestablish the more negative propensity of Bowles's verse signature, even as they attach genre tags to their fractured substance. Satire lurks everywhere, as does endemic world weariness. "Ballad," for example, parsed into three phrases of a drift into nullity, declines from the twilight existence of "no sound" and "not quiet eyes" into the violent contrast provided by nature, "hysterical rain," which commences the disintegration of being and language (being's ubiquitous mirror) that the third section attenuates, then funnels into the black pit beneath our feet and Poe's horrific pendulum:

But no a  
slow unchanging  
circle  
shall a circle  
shall a-  
round this head be  
falling where  
no cricket dares to  
chirp in  
fields and hills  
recede on two sides  
in the  
night

"Poem" is no less determined to counter traditional melodies of bucolic rapture with dry denials—"no" is response and refrain

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throughout, however ultimately positive in defying the deconstruction of human experience by nature's cyclical death processes. Ironic consolation, via a discrete closing stanza, is sought in the void's timeless dimension: "Everything shall be always thus. No / Thighs shall be turned or moved. / Touched. / All shall forever be so." Again, the sole relief offered from the oppression of unwanted knowledge is a balancing of terrible opposites, unsynthesized dialectical equations, as "Poem" becomes an "Anti-Poem," and "Ballad" an "Anti-Ballad," and so forth, intimating a debt, spiritual or actual, to Tennyson's *Ballads, Chiefly Lyrical*.<sup>12</sup> Memorable literature is hardly feasible; these sparse, precious rinds seem as flat and dull as "The Path to the Pond" was touching and animated, though admirable for the brave starkness of their stance.

Fantasy grants "Message" a greater degree of narrative allure as a dragon is tracked through the streets of an alien, night-shrouded city. Its message, however, predictably grim, is translated into a landscape lesson:

He floundered down the streets away from the hillside  
 The laugh splashed across the twisted river  
 All the domes of the city trembled in alabaster  
 And at the edges of the copses in the southern suburbs  
 The drier grasses split and crinkled

But it is "Taedium Vitae," the title of which alembicates the essence of the anti-self's tactic and existential petrification, that sounds the faint clarion call of Bowles's languid despair. A transitory sexual escapade meanders into contemplation of night-menaced ruins amid music of death and decay as "slowly of slowly the flutes of the lost desert afternoon / tremble and crumble into an evening a day away."

The three poems from 1930 are ampler, lusher, jettisoning lyric compression in favor of a prose-broad concentration upon a distant place, presumably Morocco, which has the sort of terrain—desert, primitive villages, surprising ocean coast, exotic Arab cities associated by Westerners (and Hollywood) with sinister betrayals and perversions—most congenial to his alienated temperament and Romantic bent: "Beyond the mountain pass where the palm plumes drooped, silence would swing over the valley to the lake." This sentence from "The Day Is a Wide Place" reiterates the poem's painterly approach, narrative and poetic intensities eschewed for pictorial notations and an atmospheric apostrophe, a typography of mood that addresses mist, light, stars, mountains, and human traveler with animistic familiarity until a final

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stanza brings the journey (psychological and dreamed) to a rippling rest:

Swollen bubble of glacial water high where no camel could travel,  
small memories of your hazardous site would  
infest the sleeper's brain some later night when  
once more he had reached the lower cities, when  
again he rested near the camphor tree.

In a deft brush stroke, the sleeper's recollection of the danger traversed summarizes poem and dream as lilting recapitulation of a temporary victory over nature, though the Wordsworthian phenomena staining the narrator's consciousness is so vast and enduring—*infest* is the hub verb—as to ensure unceasing concessions to nature's inevitable triumph.

Subdivided into eight chunks of prose, "No Village" widens the horizons of Bowles's allegorical scenery to incorporate a first-person eye and Astrea, star maiden, real or legendary, certainly offspring to Poe's astral parade of prepubescently inspired heroines: "Astrea! Have I died in this room this evening? Lice swarm on my hands and the ignus fatuus on the heather runs before me." Landscapes vary en route to the "No Village" site, the sole village left for such an imagination to excavate from the literal shards of experience given it by situation and place, but chaste, elusive Astrea is muse and absent love object from the beginning of the predictable quest. "Where have you led me, Astrea?" he implores her. "Are the hills always as remote as they are this night? Is every lane as cold as your finger?"

There is something almost naive about the structure of "No Village," which incongruously conjures up Scrooge's Christmas Eve flight with a benign spirit. The interrogatives are childish in their avidity for momentousness. Yet, the eighth section's zenith convergence of parallel motifs—speaker's artistic chore as Astrea's chosen prey and the mounting panorama of travel specifics—verges on redemption, saving its author from self-crippling negativism:

Astrea, I shall tell you the final place where the eyes will rest.  
The lemontrees line the harbor and the sharktooth is buried in  
the foam. The noonday sand glitters and sailors enter the squalid  
cafes. The whistle of a steamboat beyond the promontory is an  
ague and the redhaired woman eats a tangerine. The yellow  
pennant shakes in the seawind and the butcher on the sidestreet  
eats his lunch. In the park the swans croak and barnacles are  
scraped from the ship's side. The narrow streets shudder with  
heat as the cactus of the hillside hides the scorpion. The  
mechanical piano vomits a sour melody. In the patio the fountain  
dribbles. Stretch, cape, sixteen miles away, and stop the larger

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tropic waves. The octopus is languid in the aquarium and the lizards run along the gravel by the roses. On the quay the beggar dozes and horses stamp hungrily in the square. The day lunges into the hot afternoon and the wind shrills angrily across the beach. The lighthouse stands a white obelisk and urchins bathe by the causeway at the edge of the town. The girl sobs in the courtyard. Two raging cats rack the air with cries. The wheels on the cobblestones make a presto and from the hill the mountain range is topped with snow. And in the lazy village there is no village.

Invidious comparisons between urban port and the "lazy village" where no village intrudes, where no human corruption jams nature's immense, multifaceted dynamo, bisects, and thereby distorts, a convincing descriptive mosaic—of course the cafés are "squalid," the piano roll "vomits a sour melody." But it is, after all, a poem about poetry, about the task Bowles conceives as his onus and mission, which demands endless recourse to the sly selection and juxtapositions of those pictorial elements (natural and man-made) most conducive to imparting the symbol code and toxic mood of his main persona or anti-self. Anticipating Sartre, "No Village" projects an existential malaise that constricts and pollutes the senses to the extent of manufacturing hell on earth inside the diminished circle of a retarded ego's self-disgust, although Bowles retains sufficient Romantic innocence to locate partial compensation in the vivid array of tourist beauties an indifferent cosmos amasses.

In a similar way, the surreal lens in "Watervariation" is coupled with the sun at the outset: "The land moves away and the sulphur lilies stand under the / whitening sky as the eye's edge appears." Contesting the telescope vision inherent in Bowles's microcosm, where human beings are constantly contracted into victims or lesser landscape features, their defiance of a hard fate restricted to erotic, ritualistic violence, the poem's figurative progress is refreshingly dilatational:

The eye, striving to recall in the morning the warmer fastness of a hanging valley, moves in growing circles, a gull flying in white spirals where the sun arrives with a great noise out of the water to make the sky a color.

A convolution of focus and reference had occurred in the previous stanza, when the persona (a "we") spoke from an inland vantage that contrasts a volcano's effect on water "moving in all directions in indecision" with "the reveille whining in port." Inner and outer states of a monitoring psyche have attained metaphoric equity by the dawn's subsumption of their circular images in larger rotations of planet and

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mother star. *Accept, accept*, is still the rote sermon, a victim's pathetic identification with his omnipotent persecutor, placating the void with a minimalist stance, though the subliminal communication encoding imagery and architecture diametrically oppose this reading.

Four years elapsed before Bowles returned to poetry, composing two French poems (beyond my province) and "The Years Move Outward (Scene I)," first in a sequence of poems that would span to 1940. The initial stanza of the latter is preparing the stage—the segments are designed to simulate panels in a tableau and/or scenes in a play—for the further adventures of a submissive but tenacious psyche, near exhaustion, breakdown:

The years move outward, music from behind trees.  
 In the oasis the wind roars. The palmtrunks circle.  
 All but the squeal of rigging, the lantern and the bells,  
 all but the early afternoons of distant icebergs  
 and accordion tangos off the Grand Banks.  
 All but the sadness of journeying alone,  
 the lostness and the sudden squalls of snow.

Wasteland sterility finds its contrary thrust in imagination, always the barrier reef at world's edge, which can convert palm trees into ships and a cool breeze into iceberg blasts, sand into snow, but cannot relieve the sadness of existence, a life reduced to a solo voyage toward Poe's white nullity. Death is skewered as a human event in the second stanza, an event that cannot be repelled by the walls around the garden of Amar, a native friend, whose cousin had died of fever—"He remembered you. He spoke once of you, last year"—and whose only consolation is also art, traditional rite: "Amar sang a few expected songs." And the third stanza's terrifying resolution of the first two stanzas' harsh thesis-and-antithesis tension implies that even imagination ("gestures") can no longer fend off cancerous emptiness:

The skin dries slowly, the centipedes are still asleep,  
 and some days the sky is sharp and dark as midnight.  
 At dawn the dogs howl, and again at night.  
 Between, each day is empty as the wind that smells of nothing.  
 The gestures are gone. Now frantic silence is here.

Language gestures, however, for poet and singer, neutralize suicidal surrender—a minimal aesthetic's last-ditch aggression—and "A Melody (Scene II)" lifts the dirge into elegiac activism, "a melody on the definite sky" that grapples with madness ("insects claw inside the head") and mourning: "I have left your eyes three months back." For comfort, memory must suffice, identity's basement building block: "Your

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undaunted smile breaks into flame / Ashes of malady and milk of wind." And "Sidi Amar in Winter," from the same year (1935), serves as linchpin for the first three poems in the series:

But I think I have never seen your face  
 A rainy day, when the sky's grey arteries  
 Pulse about the trees, and in your heart  
 Water running. I have never seen you weeping  
 With the droning of the night, your head resisting silence.  
 There will come a day when the lines upon the sky  
 Will cling no more around the towers  
 And you who tremble in the night  
 Will go to grey places with an unknown thing.

The menace released by the last line is well earned, if too melodramatic, and the trinity of laments, as a unit, maintains a high level of artisanship.

The nine poems that follow are elaborated around the conceit of illness, a protagonist felled by fever and hospitalized, like Amar's cousin, facing death as immediate presence, while an ambiguous plot and background introduce history, the shade of war incarnating psychological sickness. "All Too Well" commences with mythic allusion amid concrete, if scrambled, circumstances:

This first befell opiate eyes: a voyage and coins.  
 At the table sat a doctor.  
 Now the sunlight, now the street. His shoes soundless.  
 Now the trees.

Someone has gone—"Beyond the shore you exit sighing. Water three days"—and grief amalgamates with what ails the speaker: "Timeless disease. Well of summer."

As might be expected in a Bowles construct, oppositional pairings are the syntactical and figurative rule. The speaker, the patient, questions the doctor, at least in his mind, about the demise of another casualty—"By the rocks he fell. / Here,—am I correct, Doctor?"—until the closing three lines bind together the sense of loss and sickness permeating the poem:

Doctor, these dark hands, shall I find them? Shall I know?  
 Befell gemlike quiet. Befell tender hills.  
 Wind, gloam, and sign. High pain.

Interrogatives and declaratives struggle for control as language again slides and cracks into smaller chunks.

The "pain" at the end of "All Too Well"—a title that mockingly resists the lie of superficial health, of surface normality—has specific victim and hospital room in the first stanza of "Scene III," which

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confirms the mental, physical, and spiritual breadth of the speaker's malady:

Sometimes the fever comes back and I can see the mountains  
the morning heavy with nuns walking  
and the hypodermics of hunger,  
the rapacious trees, the false waterfalls shining with spiders,  
the vines of silence.

I see the same deaf mountains, their mouths stuffed with snow,  
and I move my fingers a bit; even so,  
I need help.

Someone else, unidentified, interjects a comment that portentously broadens the confessional canvas: "That day two thousand men perished there on the endless shore." Disease thus spreads from self to other, from private dislocation to a historic contagion ("For us: barbed wire, open mouths, dry blood") that gives the customary swoon into disintegration a communal sweep:

The wind in fragments drops  
down the mountain passes.  
We must scream without respite—  
he who stops is lost.

The seven poems rounding out the sequence from 1940 mesh the illness conceit with social disruption and broodings upon weightier matters, such as detecting "our fault" in loving "only the skull of Beauty / Without knowing who she was, of what she died." Bowles's defeatist passivity is justified anew by a world gone mad and savage:

Now flies bite worst where the skin is broken  
Illness triumphs. Lesions. Soon tumors sprout.  
The bloated plants quiver, the seeds will be shaken  
"Your head's bashed in, darling. Look out."

The trick of intercalating bits of dialogue wears thin, as does the propensity to sand event and setting down to bones, severed skeletons.

Pathology, an anti-self defense and target when minimizing aesthetic falters, takes command, so that "Love Poem" concludes the sequence, Eros displaced by sadistic nightmare:

The head is where the cricket sings  
The cheeks are what the teeth will bite  
The lake is where the lover flings  
The other in the dead of night  
The lips are where the blood goes in  
The eyes are what the fingers claw  
Knowing now what might have been  
Will the lips tell what the eyes saw?

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Though acute enough in diagnosing a civilization's collapse into bestial insanity, a poem thus obsessed with disassembling the *body* of poetry—desire molds the skull of beauty in her lyric guises—cannot hope to simulate transfiguring passion, memorable verse experiences. It must settle, instead, for murder and vivisection, a child's fantasy revenge that confounds reader expectations and questions art's capacity for assimilating truth: "Will the lips tell what the eyes saw?" Dismemberment and perverted love are the norm, violence replacing sexual union by refusing to observe the cultural constraints placed upon its act and expression. Perhaps the extremist assumptions girding "Love Poem" (another patent "anti" modality) explain why Bowles would desert poetry for twenty-nine years to crank out novels and short stories with similar arctic precision, fictions that play obsessively in a minor key around the theme of estrangement, and suffering inflicted upon strangers by a world not of their making or kind.

"Acrostic Notice" appeared in 1969, the first stanza of which articulates the lore of a survivor, who is returning to a ravaged womb:

Rooms are made to walk back into  
After time is gone.  
Pandemonium, silent voices, and there can be one  
Instant of choking. Salt burns,  
Dread lies silky in the sunlight.  
Shadows live to blind the child.  
Henceforth the house is never to be empty;  
Even the bleeding guest will count  
Rainy days before he leaves.  
Elsewhere means to move a mile or further to the east.

There is probably nothing deader or more alive than a vacant house, especially a home repossessed by its owner after a long absence. The puzzle here, which creates a surreal, animistic atmosphere of personified malevolence and again evokes the aura of doom essential to Bowles's vision, derives from further permutations of life-and-death paradoxes: an abode is resurrected but shadowed by unspecified threats and memories, unhealed wounds. Meanings are discoursed into being in the second and last stanza, characteristically gnomic, uncharacteristically propositional, as it addresses the reader with informal directness, alluding to a "desperate twilight" and "a limping host," climaxing in prophetic mysteries and action adventure:

Alchemy went out with cobalt.  
Heretics are strangled nowadays.  
Evidence: compulsion is doom

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And any wind in contrast smells of God.  
Downstream is the way; agreed? Hold on.

In isolation, the poem has a macabre charm and authority. It touches several archetypal chords—savaged childhood and self, quest for maternal refuge, insidious death fears and nostalgia, hankerings after deity—but in the context of a career's fastidious, sequential, understated rage for order, its lines are too indebted to previous lines, previous forays into well-charted wastelands. Three years later, in “Etiquette,” a woman (unidentified of course) shoulders the camel burden of Bowles's endless safari flight and pursuit:

Is it necessary to take precautions?  
This room has been blasphemed  
by crime, she said. I knew  
the moment I walked in.

Same house, same ominous zone, same clever manipulations of an escape-guest motif, same didactic, ultimately pretentious Ahab hunt for allegorical significances:

In the grottoes of the blood  
potions sear the tunnel's walls.  
There in the mountains of the mind  
beware the blind ravines.

Dark deeds are hinted at—“We were talking about poisons”—and the concluding stanza expands to incorporate yet another paranoiac fantasy with political overtones:

Is it appropriate to offer suggestions?  
Ways of walking in the spring,  
ways of sleeping in the summer  
(forbidden unless marked otherwise),  
autumn starving, winter dying  
and two porters to carry your guilt  
across the strip of no-man's land  
that flanks the eastern border.  
Does anyone imagine this will throw them off the track?

Gertrude Stein, surrealism, and acquaintance with the mythos of tropical America had taught Bowles to trust his subconscious for literary fodder, which precipitated the switch from verse, music, and music criticism to fiction and his permanent removal to Tangier (“the magic city”) in 1947:

Little by little the desire came to me to invent my own myths, adopting the point of view of the primitive mind. The only way I could devise for simulating that state was the old Surrealist

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method of abandoning conscious control and writing whatever words came from the pen.<sup>13</sup>

A rewarding procedure for a poet, if he knows, as Eliot warned, *when* to be unconscious. Too often, Bowles's poetic drive to replicate the ambience and sparse human typography of legend swerves into the territory (compulsively redundant) of self-parody and cannibalized wrecks, sleek designs without the emotive daring to match their intentions.

The clearest case in point is the title poem, which is undated but has been inserted between "Etiquette" and "Far from Why" from 1977. At seven pages, "Next to Nothing" is the longest, most ambitious of Bowles's poems, and he certainly meant for it to epitomize, in some apex fashion, his poetry's master plan. Set in an unknown country where Spanish is spoken, the poem has a Kafkaesque plot and feel:

At first there was mud, and the sound of breathing.

And no one was sure of where we were.

When we found out, it was much too late.

Its second stanza "normalizes" the madness of a dictatorial state:

The next year there were knifing matches in the stadium.

I think the people are ready for it, the mayor said.

Total involvement. A new concept in sports.

The loser does not leave the ring alive.

The first-person protagonist of "Next to Nothing," apparently a returning revolutionary—"Yes, I said we would need the machine-guns by next March"—speaks at two levels, as prodigal, unwanted son and as humanity's aging pilgrim:

The passages where no one waits go on  
and give no promise of an end.

You will find yourself among people,  
Faces, clothing, teeth and hair  
and words, and many words.

When there was life, I said that life was wrong.

What do I say now? You understand?

Questions assault order—"Who loves the fog? / Why do the birds come? / As to the clouds, you may be innocent"—and the scenes change with cinematic abruptness, rub against one another to stage a nightmarish parade of real and surreal dramas:

The woman pointed.  
That's the model we  
should have had with us.  
We thought about it,  
hung back and didn't.

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Unfortunately, in spite of a suggestive gathering of such tense moments, there is a forced conjuncture of satiric script directions and ponderous philosophizing that flaws what might have been a marvelous commentary on insanity's sane façades in our damaged world:

It will be raining up there by the time you arrive.  
 Try to get through quickly. The forest's cold green breath  
 is best left undisturbed, coiled close to the boughs.  
 In open country again you can breathe.  
 That is the theory, but our theories are untested.  
 Things are not the way they were.  
 How can we be sure? New laws apply,  
 and who knows the difference between the law and the wind?  
 And who knows the difference between you and me?

To his credit, Bowles rejects the simplistic moral stance his poem implies, calculating evil with Freudian wholeness as a universal sum rather than a national debit: "We thought there were other ways. / The darkness would stay outside. / We are not it, we said. It is not in us." But his minimalist version of artist as culture hero or anti-hero, which retains fecund roots in a youth spent among the rune fragments of Pound's and Eliot's classical gardens, dominates once again, as it must, converting lyric limitations into nostalgic strength, as in "When the trees were there I cared that they were there, / and now they are gone." It must also voice the gadfly defiance of a poet who has cultivated pathology into an immovable winter tree that can stand fast against annihilating winds of contemporary history:

I am the spider in your salad, the bloodsmear on your bread.  
 I am the rusted scalpel, the thorn beneath your nail.  
 Some day I shall be of use to you, as you can never be to me.  
 The goats leap from grave to grave, and nibble at last year's  
 thistles  
 In the name of something more than nothing, of Sidi Bouayad,  
 and all who have wisdom and power and art,  
 I am the wrong direction, the dead nerve-end, the unfinished  
 scream.  
 One day my words may comfort you, as yours can never comfort  
 me.

Socrates would have approved, if not Plato, although Nietzsche's antirationalist reversals seem more pertinent. Concentration camps and atom bombs do not encourage the creation of bardic selves and their grandiose mythologies. But the derivative nature of this final stanza does not fatally undermine "Next to Nothing" as signature mini-epic of an isolate sensibility engaged in the perennially relevant chore of

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constructing a viable identity mask from bloody shards left behind by a harrowing family romance and murderous political upheavals. And so it makes tectonic sense that "Far from Why," penultimate poem in the collection and prelude to the passive closure of "Nights," should offer a condensed survivor's manual for fellow mental patients:

Who said what when  
Not what was meant  
Where heard how told  
But far from why

There is a way to master silence  
Control its curves, inhabit its dark corners  
And listen to the hiss of time outside

(Not what is meant, and far away from why)

Hopeless acceptance and the lesson of Cummings have emptied the language of antecedents, but the image of silence at least reconfirms art's tenacious mastery, its ability to endow the void below self and *res* with symbolic form, making it personal, permanent, however drained of ethical and rational content. Message and meaning are truly one.

The severe orbit described by *Next to Nothing* has proved small but courageously consistent, an extraordinarily conscientious exploration of negative emotional energies on the verge of both puberty and utter collapse. In a way, Bowles's achievement apotheosizes the dead-end dynamic pioneered by the "art for art's sake" decadence of the French symbolists and Wilde's *Yellow Book* decade, when narcissistic defense mechanisms first triggered a survival ethos based upon pure technical sincerity. Regardless, a solid handful of verses in this slender volume—"Spire Song," "Blessed Are the Meek," "The Path to the Pond," "Slow Song," and several poems from the "Scenes" series—are successful lyrics by any standard. And this must suffice to keep intact a ghost existence until more positive surges restore its heart identity.

<sup>1</sup> All the poems cited are from this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Masks were, of course, a major interest for Yeats, extending into his Japanese-influenced dramaturgy; see William Butler Yeats, *Memoirs*, ed. Denis Donoghue (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 145, 191, and 258n. He was also aware of the artist's incomplete identity outside the work: "We are, as seen from life, an artifice, an emphasis, an uncompleted arc perhaps" (p. 158).

<sup>3</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein & Day, rev. 1966), p. 12. In his *American Fictions: 1940–1980* (New York: Harper, 1985), p. 206n, Frederick R. Karl more perceptively notes that Bowles "uses the

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journey as a form of discovery even when it leads to self-destruction. Only the 'ultimate' expression of self can jar self from exhaustion."

<sup>4</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972). Page numbers in the text will be preceded by WS.

<sup>5</sup> Millicent Dillon, *A Little Original Sin: The Life and Work of Jane Bowles* (New York: Holt, 1981), p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See R. R. Grinker et al., *The Borderline Syndrome* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), although Heinz Kohut's *The Analysis of Self* (New York: International Univers., 1971) and *The Restoration of Self* (New York: International Univers., 1977) are more useful from a literary standpoint, since they defy Freudian orthodoxy to present the narcissist as capable of transforming his pathological condition into a creative function without undergoing object-relations therapy.

<sup>9</sup> Dillon, *A Little Original Sin*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Though he was a Romantic who lived into the early years of the Victorian period, Thomas Hood's grim social focus and anti-Romantic burlesques foreshadowed a more realistic modern aesthetic.

<sup>11</sup> Dillon, *A Little Original Sin*, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> See *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: Norton, 1969), pp. 181-258. *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* was published in 1830, when Tennyson was only twenty-one years old.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Dillon, *A Little Original Sin*, p. 134.

# The Time of Friendship: The Short Fiction of Paul Bowles

JOHN DITSKY

There is no denying the significance to a writing career of the eventual publication of a volume of collected stories, both as a tribute to the value of that career and as a means of establishing a definitive canon of texts. Yet there remains much to be said for the critical consideration of a single volume of short fiction exactly as originally printed—that is, as an entity possessed of some degree of putative integrity. Such a deliberately limited study might well itself possess a greater scope and intensity than one devoted to the output of an entire lifetime in one particular genre. In the case of the American expatriate composer and writer Paul Bowles, a striking original claim on the attentions of readers of the short story was made with the 1950 publication of his first collection, *A Delicate Prey*. Stories by Bowles continued to appear in relatively distinguished magazines throughout the 1950s and 1960s, however, and in 1967 the products of those years were brought together in the single volume *The Time of Friendship*.<sup>1</sup> What follows will be an attempt to isolate the artistic and humanistic values that emerge from the reading of *The Time of Friendship*, with an eye eventually to establishing, or starting to establish, some clear idea of what makes a Paul Bowles story *work*.

Of the thirteen stories in *The Time of Friendship*, nine are set in the North Africa of Bowles's longtime residence; the others take place in Mexico (two), New York City, and New England. Along with establishing the obvious importance of North Africa—specifically, Morocco—to Bowles, this preponderance also points to another, equally evident feature of Bowles's writing: the use of his exile abroad not, as was the case with some expatriates of an earlier era, to write about the

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homeland, but rather to interpret the adopted country for the enlightenment of foreigners. Given Bowles's strong ability to evoke a sense of place for his readers, and to manipulate that sense of space for purposes central to those of the stories themselves, it is interesting to watch the way the sense of local focus shifts from story to story, or even within stories, depending on whether the writer's interest is primarily texturally naturalistic or parabolic, specific or generalized, clearly perceived or hallucinatory, as it is expressed by means of the sense of place. Complicating the perceptions of all parties involved—author, reader, and characters—is the prevalence in Bowles's writing of various sorts of consciousness-warping substances: kif, hashish, alcohol. Of these things and their interrelationships, more must be said when individual stories are examined. For the moment, though, it may be observed that Paul Bowles writes a very different sort of "local color" story from his nineteenth-century literary ancestors—one in which place, far from being merely touristically photographed "material," becomes intrinsically a part of the writer's examination of human failures of all kinds.

Bowles makes no attempt to obscure his prepossessions; he places his title story at the very beginning of his collection, and endows its formal solidity with a fairly rich palette of imagery. The reader is immediately introduced to one of the two central characters, a Swiss (hence "neutral"?) woman named Fräulein Windling, who spends her winters at a North African "oasis" but is "determined to pay . . . no attention" to the troubles in the North, where the native population has risen against the French (p. 1). An unmarried schoolteacher, she is attracted to the people and landscape of the desert, of whom and which "Her first sight . . . had been a transfiguring experience"—for it seemed that "before coming here she had never been in touch with life at all" (p. 3). Ironically attracted to this desert oasis where a fuller and realer sort of life seems to offer itself, she notes of the local wood-gathering women that they seem able to read connections between the long-buried roots of trees in the very wind; so that through another irony, this wind-named character begins to discover through the force that creates deserts itself the image of a different sort of life, one of a freedom unknown to her back at her home in watchwork Switzerland.

In this setting where liaisons between adult European males and Arab boys are notoriously possible, Bowles's scarcely sexual Swiss maiden now meets a local boy some twelve years of age—Slimane, a name which tallies with that of a great Moslem king. The Suleiman/

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Slimane/Solomon coincidence of names is part of the cultural punning that the story rests upon, for young Slimane strongly requests this "Nazarene" woman not to talk about Islam, of which he thinks she knows nothing (p. 9); yet his presence seems to teach the woman more about the religion of love she professes to represent, since Slimane accepts her conspicuous presents yet "wanted nothing, expected nothing" (p. 9). Slimane enters her employ, and "It was probably her happiest season in the desert, that winter of comradeship when together they made the countless pilgrimages down the valley" (p. 8). Again, there is the irony of such a winter of supreme content, and in a desert (of all places), occurring in the midst of such formidable oppositions of forces. In this context of religious referents, such "pilgrimages" become foreshadowings, as well as further instances of Bowles's exploitations of setting.

Yet a phrase like "the time of friendship" implies the ending to such times, and fixed limitations upon their extensions. Fräulein Windling thinks as much in musing upon the way the outside world is beginning to intrude upon her relationship with Slimane, her "true" friend:

But even while she was saying, "How happy I am to see you, Slimane," she remembered that their time together was now limited, and an expression of pain passed over her face as she finished the phrase. "I shall not say a word to him about it," she decided. If he, at least, still had the illusion of unbounded time lying ahead, he would somehow retain his aura of purity and innocence, and she would feel less anguish during the time they spent together. (p. 13)

Thus, in the mind of Fräulein Windling, Slimane's approaching maturity merges with the reality of the encroaching outside world; while she defines her love and freedom as taking place within a womb of time, his own self-expression requires a thrust into the outside world, escape from the entrapment in which his own and cherished Moslem society has held him.

As this woman takes a photograph of Slimane out in the windswept desert, she conceives the incredible plan of cementing their friendship by inviting him to see a Christmas crèche she would build for him—this in spite of the fact that she herself sees the crèche idea as a way of saying that "everything was ending" (p. 14). (Even as she thinks as much, the wind sweeps sand into her eyes; even as she builds the crèche in secret, she takes some of the time remaining away from Slimane [pp. 14–15]). When the expected night arrives, things do not go right: the wind blows

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(p. 19), Slimane's presence at her meal gets thwarted, and Fräulein Windling sentimentalizes her visions of the Christmas narrative so that they tally with Slimane's own experiences:

When she told him about Bethlehem she was really describing Slimane's own village, and the house of Joseph and Mary was the house down in the *ksar* where Slimane had been born. The night sky arched above the Oued Zousfana and its stars glared down upon the cold hammada. Across the erg on their camels came the Wise Men in their burnooses and turbans, pausing at the crest of the last great dune to look ahead at the valley where the dark village lay. When she had finished, she blew her nose. (p. 20)

But when Slimane at last sees the crèche, his lack of interest is plain; in her absence, he destroys the arrangement in order to get at the candies she has decorated it with—leaving, essentially, “a pile of sand” and trash (p. 25). Fräulein Windling realizes her great mistake:

“This is the desert,” she told herself. Here food is not an adornment; it is meant to be eaten. She had spread out food and he had eaten it. Any argument which attached blame to that could only be false. And so she lay there accusing herself. “It has been too much head and high ideals,” she reflected, “and not enough heart.” Finally she traveled on the sound of the wind into sleep. (p. 26)

When the local authorities tell her she must leave the area because of the insurrection, it merely confirms for her the fact that “the time of friendship is finished” (p. 28).

An interesting aspect of Bowles's style that occurs elsewhere as well is the tendency to have his characters read meanings into landscapes and weather—on their own initiatives, as it were, and thus by no culpable and pathetic fallacy of the author. Fräulein Windling looks out over her desert surroundings, knowing that she must leave, and sees that though the desert looks the same, the reddening sky above it presages war and change (p. 29). And after Slimane accompanies her part of the way and she, finally telling him that his taking the crèche candy was truly “good” and not a dreadful act, the story ends with her realizing that Slimane has gone off to be a soldier with the help of money she has given him, and with Windling again studying the darkening sky from her train window—knowing full well that the days ahead, once she is “home,” will be filled with the dread of waiting for the news of Slimane's inevitable death (pp. 32–36). Wind and sand in this story, then, accompany both the aridity of personality that must be educated to the full nature of friendship's demands, and also, ironically,

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whisper of change and freedom, of new maturities, even though that transformation may and will lead eventually to suffering and death.

In spending so relatively much space with a single initial Bowles narrative, I recognize that at least two observations must be made by way of justification: first, that "The Time of Friendship" is, for all its Jamesian culture-clashing, quite obviously a core dramatization of Paul Bowles's own Moroccan experiences, with such elements as sexuality neatly subsumed into a higher sort of discussion (a kind of *Death in Venice* turned in upon itself, if one can imagine such a thing); second, that the story is, quite simply, also one of the two longer pieces in the collection, along with the third story, "The Hours after Noon." Between these two, Bowles has placed a briefer work called "The Successor."

"The Successor" deals with the crafty intelligence of one Ali, brother to the owner of a café to which tourists come for the view, and to spend their money. Bowles handles this narrative like a biblical parable tinged with Faulknerian and bemused sub—"outrage": as a revenge comedy of the "what-next!?" sort skillfully made subtler by the point-of-view's creation of reader complicity. Ali suffers by reason of being a second son, and therefore not his father's heir; this is "crushing injustice" (p. 38). "His brother was like the weather: one watched it and was a victim to its whims. It was written, but that did not mean it could not change" (p. 38). All that happens in this story, on the surface of things, is that Ali observes his brother accepting sleeping pills from a Belgian visitor in order to have his way with a young woman who, given too many pills, subsequently dies. The story ends with Ali in charge of the café, while his brother is being taken away by comically disbelieving police. The story is brought off, as suggested earlier, as well as one of Faulkner's about Negroes or Snopeses displaying their Darwinian capabilities: one wants to intervene; one also has to laugh.

"The Hours after Noon" is prefaced by a quotation from Baudelaire to the effect that the "echoes" of the memories of even the most "incoherent" life create a logical "music" (p. 46), and it begins with a Mrs. Callender's outburst at table to the effect that men do not understand about "such things" as the sensitivity of young women (pp. 46-47). Instead of the western Algerian desert setting of "Time of Friendship," we get in "The Hours after Noon" a more cosmopolitan Moroccan one; instead of two-party exchanges, we are given the conversations of a group of Europeans—people who are repelled by certain aspects of Moroccan life, but who themselves introduced much of what in the story is morally questionable. And in place of the Algerian Huck Slimane, who has made an earlier attempt at flight when

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we meet him first, there is Mrs. Callender's daughter Charlotte. Mrs. Callender believes in limiting a young girl's "opportunities for learning" about men (p. 51), and she is particularly concerned about the presence in the vicinity of a middle-aged roué, M. Royer (whose name may be meant to be as suggestive as Mrs. Callender's seems to be). "Voluptuous memories burned in the mind like fire in a tree stump" for Mrs. Callender (p. 51), so that her fears for her daughter are clearly projections of her own insecurities. An archaeologist friend suggests that the way to handle Royer is to send him out to the countryside, where the Moroccans know how to deal with men who chase girls—a coil of wire around the neck, and that will be that (p. 52). But Mrs. Callender is above such talk, and rejects the message of the Moroccan countryside; yet she also confesses that "In all these years of living in Morocco she had never ceased wondering at the astonishing difference made by the sun" (p. 52), and she also is wary of "the hours after noon . . . when the day had begun to go toward the night, and she no longer trusted herself to be absolutely certain of what she would do next, or what unlikely idea would come into her head" (p. 53). Again, a landscape becomes a screen on which the inner person is projected, as if one saw one's inner fears animate themselves there like so many desert imps.

By the time Charlotte and Royer meet (p. 61), her mother's attitudes toward men and toward her choice of friends has had the predictable effect of setting up a liaison between the daughter and the Frenchman. And yet it is the archaeologist who, taking Charlotte for a drive along the ocean at night, casually and brutally extracts a kiss from her (p. 66), confirming her suspicions that her mother's notions are hardly to be trusted. A pair of meetings with Royer, whom we have earlier glimpsed slapping a bothersome Moroccan child (p. 55), and Charlotte has driven her mother into asking the archaeologist to take Royer out to the countryside digging site with him. This request follows a scene in which the mother remembers her own Andalusian youth, filled as it was with "imminent possibility"; whereas now the same sort of possibility for her daughter, as the mother thinks about the matter on one of her unstable afternoons, is so disturbing that she tries to drive out the distant sound of a Moroccan wedding celebration (p. 73). When Charlotte briefly disappears, Mrs. Callender, fearing the worst, has herself driven out to the archaeological site to confront the two men; but it seems that Royer, attracted by the sound of drumming, had wandered off the night before. When the archaeologist tells her to be

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careful of the barbed wire around the site, Mrs. Callender realizes the inevitability of the results of her actions:

Now it was complete. Everything had been said. All she had to do was go on breathing deeply, facing the sea. Of course. A coil of wire around his neck. Behind a rock. A minute or two later she went back in. (p. 81)

Mrs. Callender's assumptions are exactly confirmed in the final flashback-tableau in which we see Royer, who is dallying with an Arab child he has met (we remember here not only the other child, the one he slapped, but also his telling Charlotte that his own code of honor rests upon the easy availability of girls who do not protest his advances), at the moment of his assassination. Not only does this story end with a chillingly vivid feeling of fatality, like "The Time of Friendship," but it also tallies with "The Successor" in the ways it shows the subconscious desires of its principal character working their way into realization. Finally, Bowles is at his most American in the first and third of these stories in showing his characters attempting to read answers to their own dilemmas in Nature—in the ironically juxtaposed presences of representatives of supposedly "primitive" cultures.

"A Friend of the World" balances this initial foursome by presenting Salam, who backs his self-description as "a friend of the world" and a "clean heart" by living in a Jewish neighborhood (pp. 83-84). But when the Jews kill his kitten because they wish to avenge a supposed slight upon the daughter of one of them, Salam uses magic spells to attain his revenge; and when the policeman involved in the embarrassment of the Jews gives Salam further trouble, he uses kif dreams to devise a more direct and less magical way of relieving himself of yet another annoyance. It seems that this "friend of the world" is just that—except to his enemies; woe to those who cross him. But the story is gently and humorously told, and when things are more or less back to normal, one cannot feel of Salam quite the fear engendered by very much the same sort of reader complicity by Ali in "The Successor."

With folk magic—or superstition—and the use of drugs now introduced into the collection, Bowles radically shifts the narrative texture of his material. "He of the Assembly" is, for the reader, rather like what the direct experience of such drugs must be; one suspects, moreover, that if the piece were not indeed written under their influence, firsthand experiences surely went into the making of the final product. The relationship between the kif-smoking "He of the Assembly" and Ben Tajeh is premised on the former's drug-induced abilities to transcend the limitations of the present moment and of

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surface realities. Eventually, order in the surface world is restored through consultation of the world of drugged states of mind; the narrative is finally a demonstration of the validity of the kif-smoker's maxim quoted at the story's end: "A pipe of kif before breakfast gives a man the strength of a hundred camels in the courtyard" (p. 112). In a direct line of succession from the accounts of Poe and De Quincey, "He of the Assembly" allows the form and texture of the story to be shaped by the logic and syntax of the drug dream; the difficulty of reading through this piece is heightened by the very heightening of imagery drugs induce, while blocking the narrative out in lengthy paragraphs overturns the normal narrative rhythmical elements of action and dialogue in favor of something seamless and recognizing no conventional barriers to the free flow of consciousness.

The last four North African stories take setting very much for granted; they have the rightness of tone one would associate with a region's native literary product. Bowles does not explain; he provides no glosses. The very title of the next selection, "The Story of Lahcen and Idir," establishes an easy familiarity with a timeless and traditional narrative idiom in which the recent events of the story take on a sense of permanent validity as observations of human behavior; thus Bowles's offhandedness in these imitations—while also proving the quality of his writer's ear, and his sensitivity to nuances of expression in a culture with a strongly oral narrative tradition—also involves the reader in an unfamiliar terrain on which his own cultural assumptions are shown to have little resonance or force. It is as if Bowles, with the introduction of kif into his narrational sequence, had with that act allowed the replacement of the world of familiar Judeo-Christian referents by a triumphant and rather unfamiliar Moslem—or Arab, or specifically Moroccan—one. Moroccan points of view are employed, and the Europeans have either disappeared or become minor and temporary nuisances.

"The Story of Lahcen and Idir" introduces two men, one a drinker and the other a smoker of kif. Lahcen sees a girl along the beach and decides on the spot that she is a whore. Lahcen later decides not to stay with the girl and brings Idir a ring instead, but a bird steals the ring during a lengthy private orgy of kif-smoking. Later, Idir gives Lahcen a used pair of shoes in return, which leads to Lahcen's using Idir to test out a girl he has found sexually accommodating—though once again he is driven to know whether or not she is also a whore. In the end the two friends fight, and Idir wins and goes off with the girl; Lahcen plans revenge, but gets drunk instead. The kif-smoker gets the girl—if only

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because he lacks the manic commitment to absurd absolute values of his drunken friend.

By now the pattern of meaning by which the collection's title is meant to be read has long since emerged. Friendship—or any mutually beneficial relationship between individuals—is always apt to be fleeting, elusive, and woefully temporary. The pattern is repeated in "The Wind at Beni Midar," a story set in a remote and boring outpost where a barracks of soldiers happen to be stationed. Among them is Driss, who has listened to government promises of a new day dawning so long that he looks down on the comparative savage and superstitious Djilala (p. 124), and boasts to his father that the government will soon put an end to superstitious practices (though Driss himself looks with disfavor on his fellow soldiers who do not observe the Moslem practices [pp. 124–25]). Driss makes a deal to use a sentry's rifle to go hunting with, but gets distracted by a kif-binge during which he manages to lose the gun. His friendly cabran, now angry, locks up both men and confiscates Driss's kif—which he proceeds to sample (p. 129). Because Driss can only connect the loss of the rifle with a Djilali's dancing and a dog's barking, the cabran—as a joke—contrives to have the gun miraculously reappear in the presence of a dancing Djilali (pp. 131–32). Driss is afraid to have to admit belief in the existence of *djinns* and *affrits*, but then he discovers that the cabran has fooled him—and thus another Bowles revenge plot is born. If Driss only dimly understands what has been done to him, if his freedom from his former superstitions is very much in doubt, still he manages to contrive a means of ridding himself of one antagonist, the soldier from whom he had borrowed the rifle and who now has a grudge against him, and also the cabran. A poison of his own purchasing dispatches the cabran, and now Driss feels that the cabran's evil power has been broken (p. 136). Indeed, it is the cabran who is broken, while Driss returns to the level of understanding from which he had sprung. It is another of those victories in Bowles's characters' lives which ultimately cost much more than they achieve. Furthermore, with the various levels of superstition open to human credulousness being so many, how is it possible to be free of all of them, assuming freedom from any is within our grasps?

In the two parables which conclude this section, the first—"The Hyena"—consists of an Aesopian encounter between a hyena and a stork, both of them consigned by folk belief to roles made sacred and magical. In the course of a few fascinating pages of dialogue, the hyena manages to dissuade the stork from a belief in his own magical

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sanctity—whereupon the hyena pounces upon the stork, kills him, and leaves him for ten days of proper seasoning:

Ten days later the hyena went to the cave and found the stork where he had left him. The ants had not been there. "Good," he said. He devoured what he wanted and went outside to a large flat rock above the entrance to the cave. There in the moonlight he stood a while, vomiting.

He ate some of his vomit and rolled for a long time in the rest of it, rubbing it deep into his coat. Then he thanked Allah for eyes that could see the valley in the moonlight, and for a nose that could smell the carrion on the wind. He rolled some more and licked the rock under him. For a while he lay there panting. Soon he got up and limped on his way. (pp. 140-41)

The deliberately disgusting imagery which accompanies the ending of "The Hyena" is, in a sense, no more vividly awful than the language heretofore used to accompany the deeds of Bowles's human characters. In a very real sense, "The Hyena" is a bit of an anti-fable: it teaches no lessons to human beings which are extraneous to human nature itself; its "lesson" is, rather, that nature desacralized and devoid of its accretion of imposed myth, or spirituality, becomes free to become itself—whereupon no moral judgments should accrue to the consequences of such self-attainment. It is rather like the "is"-philosophy explored in John Steinbeck's fiction and borrowed for the purpose from Steinbeck's friend Ed Ricketts. In such a system, then, no wonder that the time of friendship is attenuated, circumscribed.

The last of the Arabian stories and the second of the parabolic pieces, "The Garden," is parallel to the first. In it, the basic image is that of the garden—a Voltairean image for a Voltairean truth. A man works his garden until it is the most beautiful thing in the oasis on which he lives; his wife, seeing the joy given him by his possession shining forth from the man's eyes, decides that the man must have found a fortune which he is keeping hidden from her. She procures a magic herbal mixture to make him reveal his hiding place, adding more and more of it into his food until the man grows ill and falls into a deep sleep, whereupon the wife, fearing she will be blamed for his death, runs away. After three days, the man recovers, but he has forgotten everything—even that he has a wife. All he knows now is his garden, and when he even forgets to thank Allah for his good luck, his suspicious neighbors finally kill him. "Little by little the sand covered everything. The trees died, and very soon the garden was gone. Only the desert was there" (p. 145). It is as though, even if the plain truth be that nothing has meaning but what an individual creates out of the

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promptings of his own nature, that truth will not satisfy the mass of men, who demand some sort of imposed and arbitrary metaphysics.

Of the two Mexican stories, the first, "Doña Faustina," concerns the titular character and the out-of-the-way inn she has bought, one at which the servant José one day finds a hidden tank of water out in the dense underbrush filling the inn property (p. 150). Before this, Doña Faustina has been established as something of a mysterious recluse—a mystery deepened by her failure to cooperate in the investigation into the disappearances of certain neighborhood babies. When an equally mysterious young intruder forces himself upon Doña Faustina one evening, she responds by giving him an object to eat; he resists, then "bit into it as if it had been a plum" (p. 154). "Now you will have the power of two" (p. 155), she tells him; and a few lines later she identifies the object as "the heart," confirming the reader's worst fears. Doña Faustina herself is pregnant by her young visitor, she announces; the baby—which arrives on schedule—is to have "the power of thirty-seven" (p. 156). And shortly thereafter, José, who thinks "she got the child from the Devil," discovers a crocodile living in the jungle water tank (p. 157). In fact, there are two; but by this time Doña Faustina has fled with her son "Jesus Maria," taking a job as matron of police. Her son grows up to become an army colonel, even eventually capturing a famous bandit and thirty-six of his men. The story ends with Jesus Maria trying to mimic the expression on the face of the bandit chief, whom he has by now released:

The man's face had looked something like that; he would never be able to get it exactly, but he would go on trying because it made him happy to recall that moment—the only time he had ever known how it feels to have power. (p. 161)

In this parable of one woman's ruthless and macabre quest for power through the Aztec device of eating the hearts of the enemy—in this case, innocent babies—the Faustian enterprise is frustrated when her son makes ironic use of his unknown birthright: power, for him, comes from renouncing control over others, and this significantly named Jesus Maria achieves his singular power at the moment when, fatherless, he apparently recognizes his image and likeness in the face of the man he frees. "Doña Faustina" would seem, in the neatness with which it combines Indian, Christian, and literary myths, and the way in which it exploits the exoticism of its almost fairy-tale jungle setting, to be a kind of digression for Paul Bowles, if not simply some sort of literary exercise in the grotesque.

Not necessarily. The power of the eaten hearts, after all, is a

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magical power given by drugs—like the camelpower referred to in “He of the Assembly.” And like that latter drug-trip enterprise, the other Mexican story, “Tapiama,” uses alcohol (in Malcolm Lowry’s manner) to lace a narrative which, in its central and dangerous imagery, has all the vividness of dream experience. A photographer, walking off a bad case of indigestion, meets a mysterious boatman heading for “Tapiama,” whatever or wherever that might be (p. 167). Thanks to the photographer’s state, a result of improper diet and overindulgence in alcohol, the elements of his experience take on the heightened and dulled—or narrowed—quality of drink-induced dreaming. (But throughout all of this, there is also—for the reader, at least—an enormously dangerous atmosphere abuilding; the reader becomes a rear-view mirror for this narrative, able to glimpse danger approaching from oblique angles yet powerless to warn the central character.) The sights and sounds and other sensory phenomena encountered include: frogs, a cantina, strangers there, a girl, a snake, ants, and old man and a boy, a soldier, dogs, a monkey, and the boat itself. In the end, the photographer, this recorder of reality, makes his way back to the world he understands largely on the basis of his ability to imitate a jungle bird that says, and is “*Idigaraga*” (p. 181). Having “accepted defeat” in this setting, he is now involved in fitting “the bird correctly into the pattern” (p. 181). One imagines this representative of a technological civilization trying with difficulty to summon up another accurate bird-call, his upper lip gleaming with perspiration, his limbs immobile with fatigue.

With “If I Should Open My Mouth” Bowles shifts his setting to New York. Though this account of big-city madness is curiously anticipatory of the recent Tylenol murders, Bowles seems more interested in inner mental states this time than in the reflection of those states in the surrounding “landscape.” While he does not ignore the latter, then, he concentrates on direct, first-person self-revelation and casts the story in diary form. The narrator has his own notions of right and wrong, and these are obviously the warped results of city living; the “reprehensible aspects of [his] silly little project” do not preclude his feeling “hugely righteous about it all” (p. 183). The narrator, it seems—a bit of a grown child, prissy-voiced, alone in the wake of his wife’s departure—is occupied with planting penny boxes of poisoned candy in the machines in subway stations. The reason? The emergence of democratic man, perhaps; Rousseau is one of the narrator’s culprits:

That unpardonable mechanism, the intellect, has several detestable aspects. Perhaps the worst is the interpenetration of minds; the influence, unconscious, even, that one mind can have over

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millions, is unforeseeable, immeasurable. You never know what form it will take, when it will make itself manifest. (p. 189)

But when the narrator's disappointment at not finding word of the fruits of his dirty work in the newspapers begins to turn to rage, he finds himself entering a sort of dream-state increasingly difficult to distinguish from reality; indeed, when he discovers that through error he has not in fact planted the poisoned candy as planned, the dream takes over—rather like what happens in "He of the Assembly"—and the speaker imagines himself alone in a timeless state under trees in a city park. Out there somewhere there are other people, but he will "never be able to touch them," he knows: "If I should open my mouth to cry out, no sound would come forth" (p. 192). The "invisible" narrator abandons his plan, deciding instead to throw the unused boxes onto the rubbish heap behind the school: "Let the kids have them" (p. 193). Horror has been put on hold here, but not for long. The results of the ending of the time of friendship are an atrophying of the spirit.

So it is that in "The Frozen Fields" Paul Bowles returns to an American landscape, though for all the absence of desert produced by wind and sand and heat, this is interior desert nevertheless. It is apparently somewhere in New England, and in the past of a child who, as Paul Bowles himself might have, is journeying out of New York City into the wintry countryside for a family Christmas celebration. We remember that a Christmas story started off this collection, one in which an emerging young consciousness was described from without; here, though the third person is maintained throughout, the focus is on young Donald—whom we see being browbeaten by an overdemanding and restricting father. Donald prefers the farm which, like the ballet, is possessed of "magic," a world which through recollection he has managed to live in till now; but his father, should he learn of Donald's dreamlike other state (the world of the artist's refuge?), would surely destroy it by reason of his code of living by rules, such as: "Men shake hands. . . . They don't kiss each other" (p. 195). The friendliest men coming to this country Christmas, by the way, are men of whom the family does not approve; among their other, hinted-at failings are their reliances on drink and drugs (pp. 198–99). And when Donald is put to bed, from out of the "borderlands of consciousness" a "fantasy" emerges from the wintry landscape—a silent-running wolf which, smashing through the dining-room windows, seizes Donald's father by the throat and carries him off. That done, Donald sinks into an immediate slumber, and when he awakens it is Christmas morning (pp. 200–01).

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When the gifts are exchanged, the family's practical presents are far outshone by those from the wealthy Mr. Gordon—chief among them a splendid, three-foot-long fire engine which almost frightens Donald with "the power he knew it had to change his world" (p. 204). (Mr. Gordon, it seems, is sick—and Uncle Ivor, the other male of whom the family no longer approves—is his male nurse.) There is a family squabble over dinner, of course, and while Donald's father is upstairs presumably brutalizing Donald's mother, Mr. Gordon reflects on the arguments he remembers from his own childhood—adding, "Well, they're all dead now, thank God," which inspires new respect from Donald (p. 210). Out in the barn, Uncle Ivor makes a remark from his presumably tolerant-homosexual's insight to the effect that Donald's father ought perhaps never to have married; but just then, a suspicious father arrives to insist that Donald take a walk with him in the woods. Donald refuses his father's demand that he throw snowballs into the woods for fear the wolf might think them meant for him; and when the angry father roughs up his son, Donald experiences an "almost voluptuous sensation" of detachment (p. 213)—one akin, I need hardly add, to the artist's detachment manifested throughout this volume by the author himself. When the Christmas gathering breaks up in sullen resentment on the family's part, Donald sinks into his last night's sleep with another vision of the wolf taking over his consciousness. This time, presumably—since the story ends with it—it does not "leave." Running along hidden paths in the woods, the wolf at last comes to where "Donald sat waiting for him":

Then he lay down beside him, putting his heavy head in Donald's lap. Donald leaned over and buried his face in the shaggy fur of his scruff. After a while they both got up and began to run together, faster and faster, across the fields. (p. 215)

It is perhaps, a version of Slimane's flight; it is a fleeing prompted by brief glimpses of friendship but also one in which fantasy and the willingness to listen to the darkest promptings of nature are accepted without subjecting them to question and judgment on the basis of some abstract system of values or other.

Interesting as it might be to pursue the notion of *The Time of Friendship* as the pattern of a progress toward the discovery of the empathized-with natural self, such a reading might be more whimsical and arbitrary than critically useful—were it even to our purposes here. I think it more important to have seen, throughout this study, the emergence of the idea of the Paul Bowles short story—and this in spite of the enormous variety of narrative modes employed in the thirteen

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pieces the volume contains. For in general these come down, in the end, to recognitions of inadequacies in the mutual perceptions and responses of human beings, failures to observe the need discovered by Fräulein Windling: to impose ideals less, and to love more. These failures are likely to occur against a complementary exterior landscape of aridity, desolation, and estrangement—further aggravating the effects of human insufficiency. As a result, the deprived individuals are thrown back upon their inner resources and the manipulation of those resources: upon drugs and alcohol; upon fantasy and myth and magic and dream. As if denying that we must love one another or die, Bowles's characters seem determined to prove the possibility of some middle ground, neither entirely possessing nor forsaking love and death. But this is a center that will not hold; and the stories in *The Time of Friendship*, nine of them set in lands where nomads travel from oasis to oasis, are in the end masterful explorations of a country of transient feeling.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Time of Friendship* (New York: Holt. 1967). Page numbers appear in parenthesis in the text.

# Paul Bowles: Translations from the Moghrebi

MARY MARTIN ROUNTREE

From the very beginning of his residence in Morocco, his country of adoption, Paul Bowles wanted in some way to preserve expressions of the native folk culture. For years he sought, and eventually received, financial assistance from various foundations to carry out an ambitious project of recording Moroccan music. Beneath successive cultural layers superimposed by colonizing powers remained vestiges of ancient art forms that Bowles believed could lead him to the heart of the "hermetic mystery of Morocco." Among those ancient art forms he placed the inventions, sometimes fabulous, sometimes comic, of the market storyteller, spinning out his tale to a group of listeners for whom the oral tale—even today in this technological age—supplies the chief source of entertainment. It was not until the 1950s, however, after living in Morocco for decades, that Bowles began to record the stories told by some of the young men in his circle of Arab friends.

In his preface to *Five Eyes*, a collection of stories by five different tellers, Bowles describes the beginnings of what would become for him an extremely important part of his literary activity:

I had first admired Ahmed Yacoubi's [a painter and close friend whose work Bowles encouraged] stories as long ago as 1947, but it was not until 1952 that the idea occurred to me that I might be instrumental in preserving at least a few of them. . . . One day as Yacoubi began to speak, I seized a notebook and rapidly scribbled the English translation of a story . . . across its pages.<sup>1</sup>

Although the young men were by no means traditional or professional storytellers, Bowles became increasingly convinced of the value of their tales as a repository of cultural memories, and with the purchase of a

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tape recorder in the mid-Fifties, he set about in earnest his work as a translator.

As early as the 1930s Bowles had encountered the challenges of translation so that he had in some measure already developed the skills he would need in this work. Fluent in French, Spanish, and Moghrebi (the Arabic dialect of Morocco), Bowles has numerous translations to his credit, particularly after he joined the board of editors of *View*. In his autobiography, *Without Stopping* (1972), he speaks of the work involved in his best-known translation, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis Clos*, and of how the problem of finding precisely the right title for the play came to him from a sign in the New York subway: *No Exit*.<sup>2</sup>

Both the number of Moghrebi translations he has published and the fact that Bowles has been steadily engaged in this activity since the mid-Fifties testify to the value Bowles sees in them. Thus far, he has edited and translated ten volumes of various kinds of narrative—short stories, novels, autobiographies, fables—the last one *The Beach Café and the Voice* by Mohammed Mrabet appearing in 1980. Although the narratives themselves spread over a wide range of tone, character, and plot, the Moroccan narrators all have in common the fact that they are illiterate. Bowles apparently believes that the illiteracy of his storytellers contributes to the power of their stories. He says:

I'm inclined to believe that illiteracy is a prerequisite. The readers and writers I've tested have lost the necessary immediacy of contact with the material. They seem less in touch with both their memory and their imagination than the illiterates.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, the first Moroccan narrator to record extensively with Bowles was a watchman named Layachi Larbi, who uses the pseudonym Driss ben Hamed Charhadi. After Bowles had successfully translated and published a few of Charhadi's anecdotes, Charhadi, elated by the money he made and eager to continue this odd kind of "work," began to record almost daily with Bowles. The result is an entirely autobiographical account of Charhadi's hardships in growing to adulthood. Although Lawrence Stewart refers to *A Life Full of Holes* as the first Moghrebi novel,<sup>4</sup> Bowles states that an editor at Grove Press, quite arbitrarily, "had the idea of presenting the volume as a novel rather than nonfiction, so that it would be eligible for a prize offered each year by an international group of publishers. . . ."<sup>5</sup> While *A Life Full of Holes* failed to win the prize, it was translated into several languages and earned Charhadi an encouraging sum of money.

*A Life Full of Holes*, though simple and totally uncomplicated structurally, is nonetheless quite long and compelling in its detail, an

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altogether astonishing feat of sustained storytelling. Bowles accurately singles out Charhadi's gifts in his introduction to *A Life Full of Holes*: "The good storyteller keeps the thread of his narrative almost equally taut at all points. This Charhadi accomplished, apparently without effort. He never hesitated; he never varied the intensity of his eloquence."<sup>6</sup>

The title of Charhadi's autobiography comes from his own commentary on a Moghrebi saying—"Even a life full of holes, a life of nothing but waiting, is better than no life at all"—and this saying aptly describes the life of suffering, of enduring, of waiting for something better, if only a little better, that Charhadi's tale unfolds. The story begins when the young protagonist Ahmed is eight years old. His mother marries a soldier, and the harsh, oppressive stepfather figures importantly throughout the boy's life and is a heavy presence in the narratives of some of Bowles's other storytellers as well.

*A Life Full of Holes* is a painstaking depiction of a young Moroccan boy's growth to manhood in a world of miserable poverty and deprivation, of cunning, violence, and treachery. During a journey, fraught with every conceivable difficulty, Ahmed's mother turns to him at one point and says, "Ah, you see how hard life is!"<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, this is the theme of the book, which is the story of stoic endurance of a life written by Allah. Charhadi describes the drudgery of the menial jobs Ahmed passes through in his struggle to earn enough to feed himself. From being a shepherd to work on a farm where he has a number of chores such as spreading cowdung to dry for winter fuel, he moves to the city where he gets a job as a "terrah," a baker's errand boy who fetches loaves of bread from houses to be baked at the oven, then returns them. For this he receives a piece of bread from each freshly baked loaf. At night he sleeps near the ovens. During this time Ahmed has the first of several jail experiences, this one occasioned by his cutting down trees to sell to "Nazarenes" (Christians) for Christmas. Charhadi's account of his jail experiences are among the more remarkable episodes in the book. He re-creates the petty tyranny of sadistic guards, the intrigue and shabby power plays among the inmates, the tedium and hardship of their living conditions. The way in which the French authorities in the judicial system pit Moslem against Moslem adds yet another dimension to Ahmed's sense of hopelessness. Never, however, does he indulge in self-pity. Though he rages against injustice around him, he accepts his fate patiently as a passage of time to be endured.

Once free from prison, Ahmed sleeps on the floor of a café at night

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and looks for work during the day. The café is frequented mainly by thieves and pickpockets, whom the young boy begs to teach him how to steal. As the days pass, and he finds no job, his will to work gradually gives way to apathy: "I stayed there in the café. I was thinking, and talking with them [the thieves], and each day I spent less time looking for work. And finally I stayed the whole time in the café, and did not look for work any more."<sup>8</sup>

When Ahmed does find work again, it is as houseboy for a couple of French homosexuals who are taken with his good looks. For a few months Ahmed flourishes in a job which gives him some sense of pride in himself and his work. He enjoys being in charge of the housekeeping duties, and, for once, he has good food and plenty of it. But Ahmed's orderly world falls apart when the relationship between the French couple breaks up because of the younger Frenchman's infatuation with an Arab youth. The remainder of the "novel" follows Ahmed's dogged attempt to maintain a measure of decency and order in his work as the Frenchman, more and more besotted by his young lovers, sinks further into poverty and degradation. The final episodes approach the implacable realism of Zola or Balzac in their focus on a weak individual slowly being destroyed by his sexual obsession. The book ends with Ahmed once again assessing the bleakness of his life:

I was thinking: Look at all the work I did for that Nazarene! And when it ended, he cursed me and threw me out. But that's all right. The stork has to wait a long time for locusts to come. Then he eats.<sup>9</sup>

Ahmed's ability to wait, to approach the threshold of hope without actually giving in to hoping, makes him an appealing figure. Charhadi's autobiography succeeds largely because his is an honest, unpretentious voice. The story he has to tell brings the Western reader remarkably close to the social realities of North Africa, and Bowles must have sensed the importance of recording the life story of an illiterate Moroccan youth.

The humiliation and pain, both physical and emotional, of Charhadi's *Life Full of Holes* are echoed in several of the other translations, for Bowles's narrators, without exception, belong to the poorer class of Moroccan society. The success of Larbi Layachi's work with Bowles attracted another young Moroccan street youth, Mohammed Mrabet, who has taped eight volumes and has contributed stories to the collection entitled *Five Eyes*. In his autobiography *Look and Move On*, published in 1976, Mrabet recounts the beginning of his collaboration with Bowles. He had met Jane and Paul Bowles on several

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occasions and one day visited their apartment in Tangier, where Bowles showed him a copy of *A Life Full of Holes* with Larbi's picture on the cover. "I began to laugh," Mrabet says, "when I saw it, because I knew Larbi could not write. How can that be Larbi's book? He can't even sign his name." Bowles then showed him Larbi's tapes and explained how he translated from the tapes. When Mrabet is assured that Larbi made enough money from the book to get married, Mrabet decides that he too has stories to tell:

I began to go see him [Bowles] several times a week, and each time I spent two hours or so recording stories. Finally I had a good collection of them. Some were tales I had heard in the cafés, some were dreams, some were inventions I made as I was recording, and some were about things that had actually happened to me.<sup>10</sup>

The first of these stories dramatizes a curious kind of modern Arabic love affair in a novel entitled *Love with a Few Hairs*, published in 1968 and later produced by the BBC. Mrabet tells a highly engrossing story of love addiction, magic potions, and witches' spells that further complicate an already complicated situation in which the handsome young protagonist Mohammed is the primary love interest not only of his wife but of his homosexual lover, Mr. David, who runs a hotel in Tangier.

At age seventeen Mohammed has already spent five relatively contented years with Mr. David when he falls in love with his beautiful young neighbor Mina. After it is clear that Mina does not reciprocate his passion, Mohammed visits a local witch, who gives him a love powder concocted of a variety of items, including a few of Mina's hairs. The powder works its magic only too well and soon Mina is imprudently in love with Mohammed. Much against her family's wishes, Mina marries Mohammed, who manages to placate Mr. David enough to extract from him considerable sums of money to pay for the bride and wedding festivities. After a few months of exhilarating happiness, very convincingly portrayed by Mrabet, the marriage turns sour when Mohammed's meddling mother-in-law, suspicious that her daughter is under a spell, consults a fortune-teller, who casts snails in the dust and determines that Mina is indeed the victim of a "false" love induced by magic.

Mrabet then describes the various means used by a witch to "disenchant" Mina, to break the bondage of her passion. The reader learns a great deal not only about the costs of these sorcerers' services but also about the sometimes hilarious ways in which spells are cast or

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broken. Mina's spell, for instance, is broken as she straddles a brazier smoking with the witch's concoction: there is a loud explosion and she is "cured." All the while, however, Mohammed remains hopelessly in love with his wife, unable to counteract the machinations of his mother-in-law, unable to sway Mina despite the profusion of gifts he lavishes upon her, thanks to his services to Mr. David, who remains a sometimes irritable but faithful supporter during Mohammed's troubles.

Mrabet's probing of the conflicting desires that paralyze Mohammed and account for his inability to leave Mina make the novel an absorbing psychological study. Even after Mohammed again tries a witch's cure to rid him of his love, he remains attached to Mina, who is increasingly unwilling to give up the material rewards of being Mohammed's wife. Eventually, it is time and the faithful Mr. David that cure him of his love addiction. With his lover's help he buys himself out of the marriage. Years later on a bus, he happens upon a dirty, ragged country woman with three small children and realizes she is his former wife and one of the children his own son. He gives the child some money, says good-bye to Mina, then goes his way, congratulating himself on his good life with Mr. David and his ability to enjoy women now without becoming attached to them as he had with Mina.

Besides being an intensive look at the psychology of obsessive love and marriage, *Love with a Few Hairs* offers in its protagonist Mohammed an example of a young Moroccan stranded between two cultures: his native Islamic traditions and values and the European manners of Mr. David's expatriate world. Though Mohammed moves freely in both worlds, he has considerable scorn for each of them. Mr. David and his friends remain "Nazarenes," the Moroccan's term of contempt for Christians or Europeans. The Nazarenes, though usually rich and powerful, are innocents, easy dupes of the more subtle, crafty Muslims. Mohammed, for example, invites Mr. David and his friends to his bride's wedding celebration, a ceremony strictly reserved for Muslim women, on the condition that each bring a bridal gift. When they arrive at the bride's home, they are quickly placed behind a curtain, where they can actually see none of the ceremony, but they go away happy with their piece of local color, and the bride's family is likewise happy with the gifts they leave behind. Mr. David's hotel and friends mean alcohol and dissipation to Mohammed's family; yet they are content with his relationship with the Englishman because he brings useful gifts, which the family promptly sells after each of his visits. On the other hand, Mohammed believes that he is "elevating" Mina by marrying her and offering her a standard of living above the primitiveness of the

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typical Moroccan lower class. In one of his many drunken rages against Mina, Mohammed berates her ungrateful attitude: "What are you, anyway? You're just a Djiblia. Your father with his djellaba and his pants a kilometer wide, and the turban down over his ears like somebody in the cinema. I've made you into something civilized."<sup>11</sup>

Pleased with his efforts as a novelist, Mrabet produced two books the following year: *The Lemon* (1969) and *M'Hashish* (1969). *The Lemon*, reminiscent of Charhadi's *A Life Full of Holes*, is the story of a young boy of twelve who is cast out into the streets by his father, who believes that the family has been shamed by the boy's rebellious behavior at the French school he attends. The spunky hero Abdeslam has his own sense of pride and refuses, no matter how sordid and difficult his existence, to humble himself to his father.

*The Lemon*, in its own way, is an initiation story, a study of one boy's passage from innocence to experience. But Abdeslam is certainly no Huckleberry Finn, and the growth the outcast Muslim youth experiences leaves him decidedly in the violence and brutality of the slums. Like Charhadi's autobiography, much of *The Lemon* concerns itself with Abdeslam's efforts to earn enough money for food and a place to sleep. Eventually, Abdeslam is befriended by a large, burly dockworker named Bachir, who carouses drunkenly with prostitutes as well as young boys. Abdeslam finds work in a café but continues to live in Bachir's squalid quarters. One of Bachir's prostitutes becomes fond of the little boy, bringing him toys and ultimately initiating him sexually. Mrabet depicts with great skill the complexity of the feelings of Abdeslam and the prostitute as the woman becomes both mother and mistress to him.

As Abdeslam enters ever more deeply into the brutality of the street world, he learns to smoke hashish and feels superior to Bachir, who prefers alcohol. As a Muslim who has learned how to read the Koran, Abdeslam associates alcohol with weakness, and though only a small boy, he stakes his personal pride on resisting the advances of the drunken Bachir, who, in front of his friends, repeatedly threatens to take Abdeslam to bed. Like sex, the streets, and hashish, the cinema plays a part in Abdeslam's loss of the innocence of childhood. At the movies he visits with his prostitute friend, he is at first sickened, then excited, by the crime and violence he sees. After a particularly brutal film he realizes that violence can compensate for his size in his uneven struggle with Bachir. Thus, one evening when Bachir kisses him in front of his drinking cronies and later tries to take him to bed,

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Abdeslam slashes him with razor blades embedded in a lemon. Thereafter, Abdeslam is known on the streets as "The Lemon."

Mrabet's second novel, though depressing, is an astonishing book mainly because of his ability to create memorable, thoroughly believable characters. The clumsy, coarse dockworker Bachir, the tender, complicated prostitute Aouicha, and the proud, feisty little hero, beautiful to look at but turned by circumstance into a lethal animal—these three make *The Lemon* more than a casual narrative spun into a tape recorder. Mrabet handles dialogue with extraordinary skill as he builds his characters and plot to an awesome climax. Although the boy Abdeslam may wish to escape to the fairyland of stories such as "Haroun er Rachid," which he reads over and over again, he is wise enough to recognize the realities to which he has been condemned when his father closed the family door behind him.

*M'Hashish*, which appeared in the same year as *The Lemon*, disappoints the expectations raised by Mrabet's first two publications. As the title of this thin volume indicates, all of the stories concern cannabis smokers. The title translates as "under the influence of hashish" or "behashished." Lawrence Stewart in his book on Bowles discusses at length Bowles's growing interest in cannabis at the time he began to work extensively with translations from the Moghrebi tapes.<sup>12</sup> According to Stewart, Bowles's storytellers always dictated while "behashished": "Indeed at no time would one of these young storytellers attempt to narrate a tale until he had smoked kif [the local hashish] and allowed its power to affect his consciousness."<sup>13</sup>

Bowles himself, having experimented with the hashish paste or jam known as "majoun," began to smoke kif at this time, although Mrabet noted that Jane Bowles approved neither of her husband's smoking nor of his working with translations instead of his own fiction.<sup>14</sup> In any event, kif, as subject or influence, fails to bring forth stories of quality in this particular volume by Mrabet. Some of the stories aim to be humorous, but the humor is mainly scatological or bawdy and the tone adolescent. In "The Doctor from Chemel," for example, a bum who has done nothing but drift and smoke kif, cures a khalifa of his rectal abscess by first feeding him majoun, then sodomizing him to burst the abscess. The grateful khalifa gives him much money and the reputation of being a remarkable healer.

Other stories are merely trivial, such as "Two Friends and the Rain," which is a short piece about two smoking friends who live together and once when high discuss the difference between rain and water during a storm. Only "Allah's Words," the story of one man's

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conversion to kif smoking, can make any claims to being genuinely comic. Allah's words come from the tape recorder of a very religious man who records the Koran and blasts it out over his neighborhood. At first his neighbors like it, but the noise becomes a nuisance, and they think the old man is crazy. The family is so ashamed that the son with a friend takes the tape and re-records it backwards. Meanwhile, the old man has met a kif smoker in a café and brings him home to reform him by playing the Koran tape for him. The frog-like words make no sense, but the kif smoker, sensing the trick played on the old man by the son, insists that he understands the garble and offers the old man a sebsi pipe of kif to relax. The old man smokes until he, too, thinks that he understands the garble. After this experience, he spends his time smoking in cafés and gives the tape recorder to his son.

Mrabet's next publication, *The Boy Who Set the Fire and Other Stories* (1975), is an odd assortment of very short tales without any dominating theme unifying the collection. Noteworthy in this volume, however, is the heavy incidence of violence and casual bloodshed. Only a few of these seventeen stories contain humorous touches; most incorporate the sinister horror of dreams and hallucinations, while others are largely autobiographical and of marginal interest. Witchcraft, omens, evil spells again figure importantly. There are tales of vengeance, such as the title story, in which a boy finds out that his mother poisoned his father in order to marry the father's best friend. The boy takes revenge by setting fire to the house and burning both his mother and her husband alive. Two of the more memorable stories in this group focus on what one might call the "generation gap." "Larbi and His Father" and "The Hut" center the action around insolent, kif-smoking youth contemptuous of the attitudes and values of the older generation. These chilling stories describe the callous cruelty of the young people toward their fathers.

By and large, *The Boy Who Set the Fire* does not measure up to Mrabet's achievements in his first two books. Unfortunately, his autobiography, *Look and Move On* (1976), proves even more disappointing. Like his hero in *Love with a Few Hairs* Mrabet seems to know how to extract the best (monetarily) from both the expatriate colony in Tangier and his own native culture. The book makes the point that Mrabet is genuinely pleased with himself—with his good looks, his sexual prowess, and so forth—but it takes a great deal of searching to find anything to admire about the man or his life as he recounts it.

The autobiography skips over Mrabet's childhood and his adolescent experiences in the streets of Tangier. Instead, he begins with his sexual relationship with an American couple who pick him up at a

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café in Tangier and then take him on his first trip to the United States, where his primary object seems to be to accumulate a tidy sum of money and dozens of suitcases of clothes. His experience with a woman, Joanne, whom he meets at a swimming pool in the Midwest, fairly accurately summarizes the nature of his relationships: "I was never bored. It was just the kind of life I enjoyed. Joanne had a great deal of money to spend. The day before I was to take the plane, we went to the bank together, and she gave me some money."<sup>15</sup> Mrabet meets Jane and Paul Bowles, marries, has two children who die shortly after birth, but he does not settle down to any introspective awareness of any of these experiences. The pace of the book is restless and shallow: "Look and Move On" proves to be more than just a title.

However, *Harmless Poisons, Blameless Sins*, a thoroughly delightful collection of tales, published also in 1976, pushes the mediocre autobiography exactly where it ought to be: very much in the background of Mrabet's total production. The protagonist in these tales is Hadidan Aharam, who, as Paul Bowles explains in his translator's note, "is the traditional rustic oaf who, in spite of his simplicity and sometimes precisely because of it, manages to impose his will upon those who have criticized and ridiculed him."<sup>16</sup> Hadidan Aharam is the archetypal rogue figure of picaresque fiction. His exploits in cunning and deception recall the coneycatching tales of the Elizabethan writer Robert Greene. While some of the stories in *Harmless Poisons, Blameless Sins* are Mrabet's versions of tales still extant among Moroccan country people, others, according to Bowles, are original inventions, and they are all refreshingly successful. Raunchy, bawdy humor abounds, for Hadidan Aharam is an earthy, shrewd peasant who is not about to miss out on any available pleasure, especially if it means making a cuckold of a more powerful, well-situated rival. Some of the stories have knocked around in oral literature of various cultures, notably the tall tale of American humor. In "The Hens" Hadidan Aharam feeds his market hens soft bread, gives them plenty of water to drink, then blows their intestines full of air to plump them up for the unsuspecting shopper. This and other stories find their counterparts in, for example, the tall tales of Mark Twain or William Faulkner.

Casual bloodshed occurs in numerous stories in this collection, Hadidan Aharam being characterized as essentially amoral. Annoyed at being awakened by the four o'clock fjer from a neighboring mosque, Hadidan Aharam takes an ax and hacks off the head of a muezzin and dumps it down a well. And in "The Rhoula" he chops up the bodies of a witch's seven beautiful daughters, piles the meat up into a great

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mound, then maims and mutilates the old witch before killing her. For this service he is praised and rewarded by the local cheikh. Although Mrabet dwells upon the acts of violence with more than a little relish, Hadidan Aharam remains a sympathetic rogue of legendary proportions.

Violence, characteristic of all of Mrabet's narratives, dominates his imagination in *The Big Mirror* (1976). Another odd love story, *The Big Mirror* is a sustained nightmare, a dark hallucination. The hero Ali marries a young girl of extraordinary beauty and prepares for her a house which features a ballroom with an immense, floor-to-ceiling mirror. The young bride spends her time captivated by her own image in the mirror. Even the birth of a child fails to break her enthrallment to the big mirror. After she slits the baby's throat before the mirror one night, she sees a wicked reflection there which suggests to her other murders. As she gazes into the mirror each night, she is transformed into a bird, flies out the window, and slits the throat of other victims, returning just before dawn. Finally, she stands before the mirror and slashes herself into a mass of mutilated flesh. With her death Ali himself assembles seven old crones who, he believes, are the evil spirits that destroyed his beautiful wife. In the ballroom he slits their throats, drains their bodies, then disposes of them in the country. In his kif dreams he marries a girl in white who can come to him only in his sleep. With its emphasis on color—red and white—and its somber tone, *The Big Mirror* is akin to the kind of horror story some of Edgar Allan Poe's narrators have to tell. Its timeless, abstract qualities suggest the hallucinatory drug-induced imagination. While the slow movement helps to create a languorous dream effect, the tale would fare better as a short story.

Mrabet's last recorded work with Bowles was published in 1980. *The Beach Café* and *The Voice* are two long short stories very different in nature. *The Beach Café* has a contemporary, realistic setting while *The Voice* is another tale of magic spells and omens. Both tales are extremely slight, even tedious, especially *The Beach Café*, which rambles along pointlessly about a truculent old café owner who says nasty, grudging things about a young man from the city who patronizes the café when he comes out to swim at the beach. The young man perversely brings the old man gifts from the city—kif, mint tea—taking a kind of pleasure in "doing good" for someone who returns these favors by speaking ill of him. *The Voice* demonstrates once again Mrabet's fondness for the supernatural. The hero of this story hears a voice which incites him to acts of increasing destruction, for which the boy is rewarded. When he

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begins to resist the demands of the voice, a beautiful young girl appears. As their friendship grows, the boy learns that the girl has been sent by the voice to poison him. Together they devise a scheme of enticing the voice down the chimney and destroying it. The success of their scheme is worth quoting in full:

He turned swiftly and tipped the cauldron [into which the voice has fallen coming down the chimney]. The boiling water poured over the floor in the doorway, making a cloud of steam that filled the air. When he could see the floor, something small and red lay there. He jumped down and went to examine it. It was a small lump of flesh about the size of a hen's liver.

Give me the powder it brought you! cried Mseud, and Tania handed him a small box. He stared at the mass of flesh on the floor. It was twitching feebly, like a fish stranded on the sand. Opening the box, he poured the powder over it. The edges of the flesh reached up and curled around the powder, enfolding it. Then, while they watched, the thing turned black. All that remained was a cinder.<sup>17</sup>

The evil voice destroyed, the young couple, of course, marry. Mrabet's imagination seems particularly drawn to this combination of the grisly supernatural and young love.

Mohammed Mrabet is clearly Bowles's favorite storyteller. Mrabet "has no thesis to propound," writes Bowles, "no grievances to air. . . . He is a showman; his principal interest is in his own performance as virtuoso story-teller."<sup>18</sup> But in the collection *Five Eyes*, the writer who gave Bowles the most trouble as a translator stands out as the most gifted of all the storytellers. Mohammed Choukri can be called a writer because he is the only one of the five who is literate, the only one who did not tape-record his tales. Choukri's stories in *Five Eyes* were originally written in Classical Arabic, then orally translated into Moghrebi, Spanish, or French for Bowles. The four stories Choukri contributes to this volume are stylistically highly evocative, sophisticated pieces that reveal the author's wide reading in contemporary literature, particularly French. Unlike the other storytellers, Choukri is much more interested in revealing the consciousness of his characters than in constructing a plot. His sketches are therefore remarkable for their introspection and study of states of consciousness. Mainly, however, it is Choukri's suggestive prose style and his perceptions that emphasize his talent.

Taken as a whole, Bowles's translations from the Moghrebi represent an enormous labor. The accumulation of volumes over the years shows the extent to which he was willing to divert his creative

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energies from his own work. If, as Mohammed Mrabet suggests, Jane Bowles did indeed resent her husband's working as a translator at the expense of his fiction, she would surely have been alarmed by his absorption in the Moghrebi translations after her death in 1973. Although Paul Bowles in his autobiography speaks of the translations in a curiously offhand way that obscures one's impression of how committed he was to them, he has confided to Lawrence Stewart that the translations have had an important influence on the style of his own work, "so much so that people get them all mixed up."<sup>19</sup> And even a casual reading of Bowles's later stories will confirm this striking kinship: "Some think that the translations are actually my own inventions," writes Bowles, "and others think the stories I invented are really folk tales."<sup>20</sup>

Despite the disconcerting range in quality of the translations, they all share a cultural environment. "They spring," Bowles writes in the Preface to *Five Eyes*, "from a common fund of cultural memories; the unmistakable flavor of Moroccan life pervades them all."<sup>21</sup> Except for Choukri's stories, it is irrelevant to look beyond the conventions of oral literature passed down from generation to generation for literary antecedents of the translations. While Western genre definitions have dramatically influenced Moroccan writers educated in French schools and more conversant with European than with Arabic literature, Bowles's storytellers, being illiterate, are imaginatively closer to the *Thousand and One Nights*. This is precisely the heritage, distant though it may be, that Bowles meant to preserve in recording and translating the stories of these young Moroccans.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Bowles, Preface to *Five Eyes: Stories by Abdeslam Boudaïch, Mohamed Choukri, Larbi Layachi, Mohammed Mrabet, Ahmed Yacoubi* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1979), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Lawrence Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup> Bowles, *Without Stopping*, p. 351.

<sup>6</sup> Driss ben Hamed Charhadi, *A Life Full of Holes*, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammed Mrabet, *Look and Move On*, trans. Paul Bowles (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), p. 91.

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<sup>11</sup> Mohammed Mrabet, *Love with a Few Hairs*, trans. Paul Bowles (New York: Braziller, 1968), pp. 96–97.

<sup>12</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, pp. 113 ff.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. Stewart quotes Mrabet's description of his use of kif while composing his narratives:

God gave me a brain that can invent stories. And I feed it with kif. When I drank alcohol I couldn't tell stories. When I gave up drinking and changed to kif, I began to tell stories again. . . . I smoke a little, shut my eyes, and then I begin to see everything. . . . If I tell one, before I've finished telling it I have another in my head. It's like a chain. Give me twenty or thirty pipes of kif and let me lie under a tree or sit looking at the ocean, or just be in the house, looking at a plant growing in a flowerpot, or at one coal in the fire. Whatever is there opens up and changes while I'm watching it. An empty room can fill up with wonderful things, or terrible things. And the story comes from the things.

<sup>14</sup> Mrabet, *Look and Move On*, pp. 90–91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammed Mrabet, *Harmless Poisons, Blameless Sins*, trans. Paul Bowles (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> Mohammed Mrabet, *The Beach Café and The Voice*, trans. Paul Bowles (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 85.

<sup>18</sup> Bowles, Preface to *Five Eyes*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Bowles, Preface to *Five Eyes*, p. 8.

# Murder as Social Impropriety: Paul Bowles's "Evil Heroes"

WENDY LESSER

"The corpse must shock not only because it is a corpse, but also because, even for a corpse, it is shockingly out of place, as when a dog makes a mess on a drawing room carpet."

—W. H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage"

It may seem as if references to drawing-room carpets are distinctly inappropriate to a discussion of Paul Bowles's works, the vast majority of which are set in regions far beyond the reach of drawing-room civility, in places such as 1940s Morocco or 1930s Mexico. Yet only a few of the stories, and none of the novels, are purely about the indigenous inhabitants of these settings. Instead, most of his fiction deals with the meeting between these untamed parts of the world and the rigid expectations of Europeans and Americans. It is in the clash of these two sets of rules—the confrontation, as it were, between the drawing room and the desert—that Bowles finds his subjects.

The clash of cultures is not, in itself, a topic unique to Bowles. Prior versions of it appear in Forster's *A Passage to India*, Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*, and (if one counts nineteenth-century America as the wilderness) most of Henry James's novels. Where Bowles differs from these earlier writers is in the touchstone he uses to distinguish the attitudes of the two cultures. For James, the distinguishing element was money or class; for Lawrence, it was virility; and for Forster, faith. But for Bowles the touchstone is violence.

The violence in Bowles's work is often shocking and often gory, but

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it is important to notice that these two characteristics are not the same. One of his most shocking stories, "Pages from Cold Point," involves no physical violence whatsoever, while one of the more physically violent stories, "The Wind at Beni Midar" (in which the victim is beaten, knifed, and finally poisoned), is less disturbing than many of Bowles's others.<sup>1</sup> I think this is because the violence in "The Wind at Beni Midar" takes place completely within the accepted standards of the Arab world, whereas the shocking characters in "Pages from Cold Point"—an American father and son whose relationship, among other things, is incestuous—are consciously violating the rules of their own culture. Whatever shock value does accrue to the "Beni Midar" story is brought to it by the European (in which I include American) reader, whose own proprieties are violated by the story's Moslem concepts of superstition and revenge.

In some instances, a Bowles character does not even have to leave town in order to acquire the shock value of culture clash. This is true, for example, of the narrator of "If I Should Open My Mouth," a story set mainly in the subways of New York. Like Edgar Allan Poe's lunatic narrators, this character speaks in the tones of careful rationality even as he plots an outrageous crime (in this case, the insertion of poisoned chewing gum into the dispensing machines of subway stations). What cuts this would-be murderer off from his culture is madness rather than dislocation. The shock of the story comes not from his intention to commit murder, but from his failure to see his plan as anything other than an amusing game. The character's disregard of normal social values becomes clearest in the closing lines of the story, where, having failed to get rid of his forty boxes of poisoned gum, he says:

After dinner I am going to take all forty boxes to the woods behind the school and throw them on to the rubbish heap there. It's too childish a game to go on playing at my age. Let the kids have them.<sup>2</sup>

If this wry conclusion disturbs us, it is not just because we are shocked at casual murder, but because we treasure a basic social principle that children must be protected from danger at all costs. The story thus forces us into a reaction that runs something like: It's even *worse* to poison schoolchildren by mistake than to poison subway riders intentionally. Such responses come not from our legal system, which condemns premeditated murder more heavily than negligent killing, but from our less explicit social proprieties, our "drawing room" principles of behavior.

Since this kind of shocking violence must involve the violation of

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social rules, all the real criminals in Bowles's fiction are Europeans—travelers or transplants who have been altered or pushed over the edge by alien geographies. This is not because Bowles believes that Arabs or South American Indians are inherently incapable of committing murder, of violating their own social proprieties, but because his novels and stories are written for European readers. In order to be shocked at murder, such readers must sense it as in some way a violation of themselves; and to most Europeans, the behavior of alien cultures is too distant from them, in either its benign or malign forms, to create much moral reaction. The hypothetical Bowles reader possesses an attitude similar to that attributed to Stenham in *The Spider's House*:

Moss had once said to him: "For you Moslems can do no wrong," and Stenham had laughed sourly, agreed, and reflected that if that were so, neither could they do any right. They did what they did; he found it all touching and wholly ridiculous.<sup>3</sup>

This failure to make distinctions about a whole culture—to draw the line between one form of behavior and another, or one individual and another—makes Stenham unable to comprehend decent acts as well as evil ones. What *The Spider's House* stresses, in its dual portrayal of Stenham's and the boy Amar's viewpoints, is the cultural context of morality. It suggests that right and wrong can only exist within a structure of social rules, and that when these rules cease to exist—or cease to have power—then the possibility for condemning or approving any specific item of behavior also disappears. Or, as Amar thinks: "If there were no sins, then everything was necessarily a sin, which was what his father meant by the end of Islam."

Despite its progress toward disintegration—characteristic of all Bowles's novels—*The Spider's House* is perhaps the most hopeful of the four novels, in that it seems to have faith in the validity of presenting two conflicting cultures from the inside of each. It presumes, that is, that understanding is authorially possible even if the characters in the novel cannot attain it. (In this sense Bowles's hopefulness resembles the optimism of Kafka, who said something like "Hope? Oh, yes, there's infinite hope, but none for us.") And like *The Sheltering Sky*, *The Spider's House* has no real murderers, no "evil heroes"—only confused and self-centered characters who make some bad mistakes.

The two Bowles novels which do involve murder—*Let It Come Down* and *Up above the World*—are both essentially about the breakdown of social proprieties.<sup>4</sup> In the former, the breakdown occurs within a single character during the course of the novel; in the latter, the hints of this social breakdown are imbedded in the novel from the beginning. Dyar

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of *Let It Come Down* murders an Arab; Vero of *Up above the World* murders his mother, and his two houseguests. Dyar's is unmeditated murder, and Vero's is definitely premeditated. Yet the shock value of Dyar's action is even greater than that of Vero's, probably because it represents a violation not only of our general social expectations, but of the specific expectations we have built up in regard to this character.

For Dyar enters the novel, as he enters Morocco, as the least threatening of characters: the patsy for everyone else's con games. As his name suggests, this Die-er is marked for doom. He is portrayed as a victim from the first page of the novel, where his obtaining (or being obtained by) a taxi is described as "Dyar was the only prey that evening." Even he himself comes to realize his victim status, and to wish to escape it:

He was not even trying to find the Bar Lucifer; he had given that up. He was trying to lose himself. Which meant, he realized, that his great problem right now was to escape from his cage, to discover the way out of the fly-trap, to strike the chord inside himself which would liberate those qualities capable of transforming him from a victim into a winner.<sup>5</sup>

As the language here and throughout the novel suggests, the only way that Dyar can cease to be a victim is to cease being himself. This is exactly what he does: first through the uncharacteristic theft of his employer's money, next through the isolated existence he leads in hiding, and finally through the drug experience that gives rise to the murder. In killing the sleeping Thami (whom he suddenly sees as "an unidentifiable object lying there, immeasurably heavy with its own meaninglessness, a vast imponderable weight that nothing could lighten"), Dyar violates two basic "social rules": first, that you should not harm people who have helped you; and second, that murder should be an act committed out of anger, hatred, or some other identifiable motive. It is the absolute lack of affect—the utter disjunction between Dyar's perceptions and his act's consequences—that makes the scene so chilling:

"Melly diddle din," he said, quite loud, putting the point of the nail as far into Thami's ear as he could. He raised his right arm and hit the head of the nail with all his might. The object relaxed imperceptibly, as if someone had said to it: "It's all right." He laid the hammer down, and felt of the nail-head, level with the soft lobe of the ear. It had two little ridges on it; he rubbed his thumbnail across the imperfections in the steel. The nail was as firmly imbedded as if it had been driven into a coconut.<sup>6</sup>

Far from presenting an explicit claim for Thami's humanity, Bowles

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allows the narration to side with Dyar's view of the body as a "object," the head as a "coconut," and in doing so makes us react all the more strongly on Thami's behalf. Moral judgment lies in the perception of violation, and here it is the narrator's language as well as Dyar's act which violated the life of the victim. Like the narrator of "If I Should Open My Mouth," Dyar is repellent precisely because he fails to understand the violence of his behavior—because he kills not for revenge, or greed, or any other discernible motive, but causelessly.

Not that an obvious motive is sufficient to justify a murder in Bowles's world. Vero in *Up above the World* is not particularly sane (what murderer is?), but he can at least ascribe rational motives to his acts: he kills his mother to inherit her money, and then kills Dr. and Mrs. Slade to keep them from finding out and exposing him. Yet the acts are vastly out of proportion to the motives—either unnecessary (in the case of the Slades) or unjustifiable (in the case of his mother). Vero does not even have Dyar's excuse of having been taken "out of himself." He is acting altogether too much in character in these murders, and his behavior toward those he murders is merely an exaggeration of his behavior toward the other people around him—his lover Luchita, his accomplice Thorny—whom he only keeps to use. This character's basic characteristic is that he has no loyalty; he cannot be counted on for anything. Thus it is impossible for him to violate his own character, as Dyar does, because he has no consistency in the first place: he is Vero to Luchita, Grove to Thorny, and a hospitable young stranger to the Slades. What Vero violates, therefore, when he commits murder, is something completely external to himself: a set of social proprieties that he does not share.

To call these rules "external" and "social" is not to minimize their importance. As *The Spider's House* suggests, an individual's moral sense can only take shape within the larger context of a social code. And the social code that Vero violates is the most basic drawing-room set of proprieties: the obligation to be reliable, to carry out one's social duties (as host, as son), and to be pretty much what one seems to be.

Paul Bowles himself made a pointed remark on this subject in a 1982 letter written about *Up above the World*. He was answering a letter of mine in which I had commented on the surprising expectedness of the revelation of the crime—the reader's ominous and growing sense that Vero has killed his mother, Mrs. Rainmantle, even without any explicit "evidence" to support this suspicion. I had wondered what subliminal hints were given to point us so clearly in this direction. Paul Bowles replied:\*

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About *Up above the World* I think you could say that Part One is a prologue which supplies enough circumstantial evidence to make one pretty certain that Vero has killed his mother. This establishes him as the evil hero of the book. Then the action begins. I think that first "hint," as you called it, that something could be amiss is: "If only my son had been able to meet me. So unnecessary. . . ." One wonders fleetingly, I should think, what sort of son is this who can't manage to meet his mother who has come from England to see him?<sup>7</sup>

There is something both charming and disturbing about this expressed conviction that matricide is on a continuum with the failure to meet one's mother's boat. Such remarks do away forever with the use of the adjective "mere" in describing social proprieties, for in this vision social etiquette and moral behavior are inextricably linked.

That Bowles can make such assertions—in his fictions as much as in his letters—without in any way seeming an advocate of "drawing room behavior" is a tribute to the profound objectivity of his enterprise. Bowles is that rare item, a moralist who does not come down on the side of morality. That response is left to the reader, whose own social values—and, by definition, moral assumptions—are brought sharply into relief by Bowles's fictions.

<sup>1</sup> The stories cited in the text are in Paul Bowles, *Collected Stories 1930–1976* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Spider's House* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1982), p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Bowles, *Let It Come Down* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), and *Up above the World* (New York: Ecco Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Bowles, *Let It Come Down*, p. 169.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>7</sup> Unpublished letter.

# “Tea in the Sahara”: The Function of Time in the Work of Paul Bowles

MARCELLETTE G. WILLIAMS

With even the briefest glance at the protagonists who people the novels of Paul Bowles, it becomes apparent that they are all questers: Porter and Katherine Moresby have come to North Africa with the hope of reestablishing a relationship which has soured; Nelson Dyer has left his teller's cage in New York with the hope of finding in Tangier a remedy for his demoralizing sensation of motionlessness; John Stenham, equally as disillusioned with a year's stint in the Communist Party as with his New England background, has spent several years living in Morocco with the hope of somehow saving himself; Dr. Taylor Slade and his youthful wife, Desiree, have come to North Africa for the Slade Anniversary Expedition, an expedition whose goal is the kindling of a heretofore nonexistent love in their relationship.

Bowles proffers the suggestion that the “how” of his protagonists' existences be predicated upon the necessity for engagement, upon the importance of choice, and upon the authority of the individual in deciding ethical matters for himself.<sup>1</sup> Bowles's suggestion is based on the hypothesis that if a man considers his life as, basically, limited existence in time, then the success or failure of his quest relies on the manner in which he exists in that time. Implicit in such quests is a regard for life itself. If one is to be successful in his quest, then one acts properly in that time. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the manner in which time functions in Bowles's work, with particular emphasis on his first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*. By analyzing the relationship between time and actions, this examination will illustrate the thematic significance of time.

The brief first chapter of *The Sheltering Sky* requires particular

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attention inasmuch as it introduces themes and images which recur throughout all of Bowles's novels. That this chapter is significantly operative on at least four levels emphasizes its import:

He awoke, opened his eyes. The room meant very little to him; he was too deeply immersed in the non-being from which he had just come. If he had not the energy to ascertain his position in time and space, he also lacked the desire. He was somewhere, he had come back through vast regions from nowhere; there was the certitude of an infinite sadness at the core of his consciousness, but the sadness was reassuring, because it alone was familiar. He needed no further consolation. In utter comfort, utter relaxation he lay absolutely still for a while, and then sank back into one of the light momentary sleeps that occur after a long, profound one. Suddenly he opened his eyes again and looked at the watch on his wrist. It was purely a reflex action, and when he saw the time he was only confused. He sat up, gazed around the tawdry room, put his hand to his forehead, and sighing deeply, fell back onto the bed. But now he was awake; in another few seconds he knew where he was, he knew that the time was late afternoon, and that he had been sleeping since lunch. In the next room he could hear his wife stepping about in her mules on the smooth tile floor, and this sound now comforted him, since he had reached another level of consciousness where the mere certitude of being alive was not sufficient. But how difficult it was to accept the high, narrow room with its beamed ceiling, the huge apathetic designs stenciled in indifferent colors around the walls, the closed window of red and orange glass. He yawned: there was no air in the room. Later he would climb down from the high bed and fling the window open, and at that moment he would remember his dream. For although he could not recall a detail of it, he knew he had dreamed. On the other side of the window there would be air, the roofs, the town, the sea. The evening wind would cool his face as he stood looking, and at that moment the dream would be there. Now he only could lie as he was, breathing slowly, almost ready to fall asleep again, paralyzed in the airless room, not waiting for twilight but staying as he was until it should come.<sup>2</sup>

On merely a literal level the chapter provides a graphic description of a man awakening from a profound sleep and attempting to ascertain the reality of those things around him. On a connotative level, the difficulty with which Port emerges from the nonbeing of sleep suggests the difficulty which he experiences in his attempts to provide his life with meaning. On an emotional level, the chapter furnishes a feeling of an almost oppressive fatigue. And on a symbolic level, the iconography of

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his immediate environment strikes the keynote for the prefiguration of his eventual death. For all its tawdriness the room is as apathetic as is all of life to Port. Indeed, in his present state of lethargy the very airlessness of the room threatens complete paralysis. When Port glances at his watch he is only confused by what he sees. On a connotative level, this momentary confusion assumes ironic proportions because it suggests the uncertainty and confusion that Port, and later Kit, experience in their efforts to reconcile their respective positions in time.

Chapter One presents Port in three levels of consciousness: the nonbeing of sleep, the confusion of semiconsciousness, and the certitude of wakefulness. It is curious to observe the manner in which Bowles describes these levels. The nonbeing of sleep has provided "utter comfort" and "utter relaxation" but, importantly, absolute stillness. Port's movement from this level is triggered by his glance at his watch; this is an automatic movement in much the same manner in which a person's response to any sensation is automatic. He neither seeks it nor evades it; he simply does it. This movement from one level to the next is very rapid for Port. The moment in which he gazes about the room, touches his hand to his forehead, and sighs deeply are moments of collection and retention; he perceives his immediate situation. Port then proceeds to "another level of consciousness where the mere certitude of being alive was not sufficient." It is at this level that Port finds comfort in the sound of his wife's shoes as she walks about the next room. In his state of full wakefulness, that which provides Port with comfort is action. The necessity of action is a theme which is played and varied throughout all of Bowles's novels.<sup>3</sup>

The latter portion of the first chapter presents two other of Bowles's preoccupations, as Oliver Evans notes in his essay: the importance of choice and the authority of the individual in making ethical decisions. Port knows that "later he would climb down from the high bed" and that he would "remember the dream." The connotation is one of assertion rather than condition. But for the moment Port chooses to lie in bed "not waiting for twilight but staying as he was until it should come." Port is free to choose; here, he chooses to be passive, to be acted upon by his environment. Having chosen such, however, he is not free to escape the responsibility of that choice. Bowles depicts this point vividly when, later in the novel, he describes the copulation of two flies on the lips of Port's lifeless body. In spite of all its grotesqueness, life is sustained by self-generated action, and the medium in which one acts is time.

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The concept of time is central in terms of providing a distinction between the tourist and the traveler; Port regards himself as the latter:

He did not think of himself as a tourist; he was a traveler. The difference is partly one of time, he would explain. Whereas the tourist generally hurries back home at the end of a few weeks or months, the traveler, belonging no more to one place than to the next, moves slowly, over periods of years, from one part of the earth to another. (SS, p. 13)

This same attitude is shared by Nelson Dyar, who has come to Tangier in the first step of his escape from the teller's cage; John Stenham's absence from the United States has turned into several years; the Slades, too, share Port's feelings:

"I don't think you could call us exactly tourists," Mrs. Slade said.  
"We just move around where we please. It's the only way to do it. Group travel's a degradation. The whole point is to be free. Not to have to make reservations ahead of time."<sup>4</sup>

*The Sheltering Sky* is divided into three books. Book One presents the symptoms of a diseased entity (a war-torn world, but, more specifically, a human product of that world) and declares the prognosis negative. Book Two details Port's physical deterioration and death. Book Three describes Kit's mental disintegration.

The title of Book One, "Tea in the Sahara," is derived from a story which a prostitute, to whom Port has been taken by an Arab stranger, tells. She relates the story to Smail, and Smail translates it into French for Port. The story itself is a story of quest, and an unsuccessful one at that: three mountain girls who want something more out of life than do most people desire to have tea in the Sahara; to this end they leave their homes and come to the city to work as prostitutes; while there, they meet and fall in love with a handsome stranger who is visiting from his home in the Sahara; he tells them about this home, makes love to each of them, and pays them handsomely for their services; months later the girls decide to set out for the Sahara though they have only enough money for a teapot, tray, glasses, and bus tickets; once in the Sahara they proceed to seek the highest dune in order that they might see the whole of the Sahara; having found such a dune they decide to rest before having their tea; weeks later they are found just as they were when they had gone to sleep; and each of their glasses was filled with Sahara sand.

Port's uncertainty as to the story's completion and his hazarded remark as to the sadness of the story emphasize his complete unawareness of its applicability to himself. His 'unawareness' is

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symptomatic of his inner illness. Aldridge questions the validity of the inclusion of this scene inasmuch as he feels that Bowles fails to use the scene to illuminate theme and characters.<sup>5</sup> However, it appears that here again Bowles emphasizes the necessity of action: the girls had life as long as they acted, but when they rested they were acted upon quite literally and irrevocably by the timeless sand. Port, too, dies in the desert in a room which threatens at each gust of wind to be invaded by and buried in sand. Hassan has aptly noted that occurrences of limited and relative perception are often a part of what he considers to be an existential pattern of existence.<sup>6</sup>

Port observes early in the novel that "‘Everything’s getting gray, and it’ll be grayer’" (SS, p. 16). All one really has is one’s self; that constitutes the totality of his certitude. Nevertheless, we see Port confidently armed with maps and Kit equally secure with the protection afforded by her cosmetic bag. Port’s maps prove to be absolutely of no use, and Kit loses her cosmetics, along with her sanity, in one of the chaotic scenes of the novel. Even Aldridge reluctantly admits that there are moments when Bowles comes close to something more profound than mere sensationalism.<sup>7</sup>

Port’s dream, which he relates to Kit and Tunner quite early in the novel, is also such a moment. It is a symbolic statement of the totality of Bowles’s work; it also provides a key to the intensity of the relationship between time and action:

"It was daytime and I was on a train that kept putting on speed. I thought to myself: ‘We’re going to plough into a big bed with the sheets all in mountains.’ . . . And I was thinking that if I wanted to, I could live over again—start at the beginning and come right on up to the present, having exactly the same life, down to the smallest detail. . . . So I said to myself: ‘No! No!’ I couldn’t face the idea of all those God-awful fears and pains again, *in detail*. And then for no reason I looked out the window at the trees and heard myself say: ‘Yes!’ Because I knew I’d be willing to go through the whole thing again just to smell the spring the way it used to smell when I was a kid. But then I realized it was too late, because while I’d been thinking ‘No!’ I’d reached up and snapped off my incisors as if they’d been made of plaster. The train had stopped and I held my teeth in my hand, and I started to sob. You know those terrible sobs that shake you like an earthquake?" (SS, p. 17)

The use of the dream permits the author to intensify and expand a moment which is otherwise consciousnessless. As is often the case with a dream, the conscious ramifications of it occupy far more of one’s time

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and, by so doing, further serve to augment its intensity. Observe Strindberg's most successful use of this technique in his novels as well as his plays.

Port experiences and remembers this initial dream. However, in another part of the novel he awakes sobbing and with a feeling of infinite sadness but with no memory of a dream save a voice which whispers: "The soul is the weariest part of the body" (SS, p 124). Though there is no memory of the dream, the intensity of unrecalled time is fully expressed in the superlative form, "weariest."

Bowles uses a similar technique to describe Port's semiconsciousness and eventual moment of death. The disintegration of time and space precede his death:

When from time to time a gust of clarity swept down upon him, and he opened his eyes and saw what was really there, and knew where he really was, he fixed the walls, the ceiling and the floor in his memory, so that he could find his way back next time. For there were so many other parts of the world, so many other moments in time to be visited; he never was certain that the way back would really be there . . . There was no repetition in the landscape; it was always new territory and the peril increased constantly. Slowly, pitilessly the number of dimensions was lessening. (SS, p. 221)

The juxtaposition of the scene in which Kit clings desperately to Tunner while sobbing expressions of her love for Port and the scene in which Port's expiring consciousness thrusts a Sisyphean absurdity against the cracking shell of his existence produces a moment of monstrous proportions. Here Bowles achieves the same effect as the one he has used to describe Kit's utter futility resulting from her attempts to enter the barred Hotel du Ksar:

Her mind went back to the many times when, as a child, she had held a reading glass over some hapless insect, following it along the ground in its frenzied attempts to escape the increasingly accurate focusing of the lens, until finally she touched it with the blinding pinpoint of light, when as if by magic it ceased running, and she watched it slowly wither and begin to smoke. (SS, p. 150)

Bowles uses dreamlike time at two other points in the novel: Kit's nude bathing scene and the scene of her imprisonment in Belqassim's sensual chamber. In both cases the emphasis on time precipitates a focusing on action. The image of the watch from Chapter One is sustained in the bath scene:

All at once she was seized with the suspicion that something had

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happened behind her back, that time had played a trick on her: she had spent hours in the pool instead of minutes, and never realized it. . . . Absurd things like that did happen, sometimes. She bent to take her wristwatch from the stone where she had laid it. It was not there; she could not verify the hour. (SS, p. 347)

This scene is somewhat of an atavistic baptism and serves as a contrast to an earlier scene of the meeting of Port and Smail which functions as a nihilistic catechism (see SS, pp. 26, 27). In Belqassim's chamber Kit loses all sense of time, and she lives one sustained sensual moment of "mindless contentment" (SS, p. 292).

With the exception of three instances of recollection and the dream-time sequences stated above, *The Sheltering Sky* proceeds in a rather unbroken line through time. This is also true of the time structure in *Let It Come Down* with only a few exceptions in which we view the world through a hashished or majouned consciousness. In *The Spider's House* Bowles is more concerned with the possibilities of expressing a message through the medium itself, if you will. The book is divided into four parts and has a prologue. The forward movement of that novel does not begin until the last few pages of the third section. The first part of the novel is rather like a time exposure. Toward the end of the third part during a conversation between Stenham and Moss there appears a sentence which is literally as applicable to that novel as it is connotatively appropriate to suggest Bowles's very conscious use of time structure: "I had a peculiar presentiment today as I sat there speechless, watching it all, that it was only a prologue to a whole long period of suffering that hasn't even begun." <sup>18</sup>

In Bowles's last novel, *Up above the World*, there is an even greater experimentation with time in the structure. It is artificial in that it is induced by LSD, a mind-expanding drug; but only in the latter part of the novel do we learn of the use of the drug. In the meantime Bowles treats us to convolutions reminiscent of Quentin's suicide scene in *The Sound and the Fury*: evidence Chapter 20 in *Up above the World* (p. 120), which is entirely in the present tense.

The manner in which Bowles uses sleep, the condition in which Port's dream is couched, also connotes actions proper to a given time. Early in *The Sheltering Sky* neither Kit nor Port is able to sleep without difficulty. When they can sleep, the context in which they are seen renders sleep inappropriate to the time. En route to Ain Krorfa Port spends a sleepless night small-talking with the bus driver; but as soon as dawn begins to break he sleeps; subsequently: "In this way he missed the

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night's grand finale: the shifting colors that played on the sky from behind the earth before the rising of the sun" (SS, p. 110). In the last section of *The Sheltering Sky* Kit spends most of her time asleep in Belqassim's windowless room. She uses sleep not to refresh and restore her for the following day but rather as a means of remaining mindlessly content in Belqassim's absence.

In *The Spider's House* Lee Veyron expresses this same attitude toward sleep: "She lay back thinking that maybe she could lose herself in sleep once again: it was such a convenient way of making time pass" (SH, p. 347).

And in *Up above the World* sleep paralyzes rather than restores the Slades. It is interesting to note that the most striking example of the proper function of time which one spends sleeping is found in *Let It Come Down*. Bowles's source of the title, *Macbeth*, III.iii, makes the following analogy more meaningful inasmuch as the whole concept of time is so central to Macbeth.<sup>9</sup> In that play the air stifles and sleep paralyzes. The effect is that time Future is strangled in time Present. In *Let It Come Down* at the beginning of Book Three: The Age of Monsters, Bowles presents a trio, each member of which, it appears, has received the same sentence as has Macbeth:

Methinks I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!  
 Macbeth does murder sleep."—the innocent sleep,  
 Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
 The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,  
 Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
 Chief nourisher in life's feast—Still it cried,  
 "Sleep no more!" to all the house;  
 "Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
 Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."<sup>10</sup>

Wilcox suffers insomnia interspersed with broken dreams. Daisy spends an unaccountably nervous and sleepless night. And Dyar sleeps fitfully under the pressure of a mind weighted with half thoughts:

For years he had gone along not being noticed, not noticing himself, accompanying the days mechanically, exaggerating the exertion and boredom of the day to give him sleep for the night, and using the sleep to provide the energy to go through the following day. (*LICD*, p. 180)

But now the connotation is that the death of each of his days will not be knitted up in sleep. He is condemned, as it were, to the deprivation of the "chief nourisher in life's feast." Thus, Bowles suggests, even time which is consciousless (sleep) has an action proper to it: that of restoral so as to make conscious time productive.

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The “daytime” of Port’s dream offers several connotations: Desiree Slade has the nickname “Day”; the marquessa is called “Daisy.” What comes to mind, by way of comparison, is perhaps the most immortalized daisy in literature and the object of Chaucer’s admiration in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*:

The longe day I shoop me for t’abide  
For nothing elles, and I shall not lye,  
But for to loke upon the dayesie,  
That well by resoun men it calle may  
The “dayesye,” or elles the “ye of day,”  
The emperice and flour of floures alle.<sup>11</sup>

It is ironic, then, that neither Day nor Daisy can fulfill the promise of their names. And this very unfulfillment connotes the failure of Port’s quest.

The day also connotes Reason and provides a contrast to the night, the Sensual. During an afternoon conversation in the mountains Kit comments on the sadness of the hour of sunset to which Port replies:

“If I watch the end of the day—any day—I always feel it’s the end of a whole epoch. And the autumn! It might as well be the end of everything,” he said. “That’s why I hate cold countries, and love the warm ones, where there’s no winter, and when night comes you feel an opening of the life there, instead of a closing down. Don’t you feel that?” “Yes,” said Kit, “but I’m not sure I prefer the warm countries. I don’t know. I’m not sure I don’t feel that it’s wrong to try to escape the night and the winter, and that if you do you’ll have to pay for it somehow.” (SS, p. 99)

The day (as Reason) fails Port at every turn; Stenham refers to the intellect as the “soul’s pimp” (SH, p. 311). The doubt that Kit expresses in this passage is, quite probably, the difference between her life and her death, although it resolves itself in madness. Earlier in the novel we read that a constant struggle raged in her—“the war between reason and atavism” (SS, p. 44). Port insists upon Reason—Day—as his guide and is destroyed. Eisinger sees this destruction as the collapse of the intelligent and sensitive man who has nothing of value to sustain his life.<sup>12</sup> Kit, though latently inclined toward atavism—Night—retains the doubt and thus does not “pay for it” as dearly as does Port. For Hassan, her madness, and not Port’s death, represents the novel’s ultimate negation of values. His observation is acute.<sup>13</sup>

On another level of consideration, the daytime represents only a portion of the total day. Indeed, in order for a day to fulfill itself there must be a passage from morning to noon to evening to night. It is this passage of time which Port resents and would, if he could, prevent. His

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desire to freeze the moment means that he acts in any given moment with the motive of preventing the future. By so doing he ironically and pathetically denies the essence of the present. This denial constitutes relinquishing of the disproportion on the level of values observed by the absurd man. That Bowles's work exhibits Life as a given suggests an affinity with Camusian existentialism in which the heroic or successful man, according to Galloway, is the man who persists in his demand for truth in spite of a universe which says all truths are impossible.<sup>14</sup>

Both Port and Kit demonstrate a false sense of security in their expression of a desire for Timelessness. While alone with Port in his death room Kit muses:

The sudden arrival of the wind was a new omen, connected only with the time to come. It began to make a singular, animal-like sound beneath the door. If she could only give up, relax, and live in the perfect knowledge that there was no hope. But there was never any knowing or any certitude; the time to come always had more than one possible direction. One could not even give up hope. The wind would blow, the sand would settle, and in some as yet unforeseen manner time would bring about a change which could only be terrifying, since it would not be a continuation of the present. (SS, p. 207)

This desire for timelessness is fatal; it does not permit one to live. One exists but with no hope of providing his life with essence. One is acted upon. Kit seems to sense the fatality in this life style:

Because neither she nor Port had ever lived a life of any kind of regularity, they both had made the fatal error of coming hazily to regard time as nonexistent. One year was like another year. Eventually everything would happen. (SS, p. 133)

In *The Spider's House* Lee concludes that Stenham's attraction for Amar is based on the fact that Amar appears to her untouched by time: "To him [Stenham] he was a consolation, a living proof that today's triumph was not yet total; he personified Stenham's infantile hope that time might still be halted and man sent back to his origins" (SH, p. 345).

Nelson Dyar, too, expresses the wish to be able to isolate the Now: "If only existence could be cut down to the pinpoint of here and now, with no echoes reverberating from the past, no tinglings of expectations from the past, no tinglings of expectations from time not yet arrived."<sup>15</sup>

Shortly before Thami is killed he recalls a proverb, a proverb about the day, which his father had often repeated to him when he was a child. Thami had always invested the proverb with a certain magical and mysterious truth: "The morning is a little boy. Noon is man. Twilight is an old man. I smile at the first. I admire the second. I

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venerate the last" (*LICD*, p. 273). The mystery and magic of this proverb lies in the very concept of Life. Life implies movement and change; stasis can only mean "decay and death" (*SH*, p. 312). Moulay Ali, a leader of one of the political factions in *The Spider's House*, suggests to Amar the manner in which one should act in any given time:

It's very bad to be impatient. In this work, at times like this, every day is like a year. You know the situation in the morning; by evening it's all different, and you have to learn it all over again. But the one who wins is the one who studies it most.

(SH, p. 380)

Moulay Ali's hypothesis is that time exists and changes. His implied conclusion is that one survives in time by the recognition and acceptance of that hypothesis, which then becomes the basis for all action. Actions motivated in retrospection or anticipation are actions which negate the present, destroy the "day." Port somehow senses the futility of this life-posture:

And it occurred to him that a walk through the countryside was a sort of epitome of the passage through life itself. One never took the time to savor the details; one said: another day, but always with the hidden knowledge that each day was unique and final, that there never would be a return, another time. (SS, p. 132)

The landscape of Port's dream evokes memories so pleasant to Port as to make him feel that he could live his life over again. The landscape qua landscape is neither malevolent nor benevolent in Bowles's novels. Eisinger notes that nature in the stark climates of Bowles's novels reveals more starkly than elsewhere its unconcern with the destiny of man.<sup>16</sup> However, when a man does not function properly as man—that is, does not act—then he is acted upon by any and all other forces, the landscape representing the totality of those forces. It is in this manner that the landscape appears malevolent. Evidence the tawdry, airless room with which the novel opens and the wind-beaten, half-buried room in which Port dies.

For Kit the landscape is most often foreboding and ominous. The tenacity with which she clings to her beliefs in omens and superstitions has a paralyzing effect on her. Daoud Zozeph, the Jew who makes her aware of the sentiment of sympathy so lacking in the human landscape, tells her:

"The mistake you make is in being afraid. That is the greatest mistake. The signs are given us for our good, not for our harm. But when you are afraid you read them wrong and make bad things where good ones were meant to be. That is not the way to live." (SS, p. 226)

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Port is acted upon by the outer landscape as well as the landscape of his mind. In his fevered condition dimensions merge the landscapes of his mind until he is confronted with the horror of "existence unmodifiable" (SS, p. 223). And in a description of the literal landscape we find what could easily be a description of Port:

The town below was invisible—not a light showed—but to the north glimmered the white ereg, the vast ocean of sand with its frozen swirling crests, its unmoving silence. The air, doubly still now after the departure of the wind, was like something paralyzed. Whichever way she looked, the night's landscape suggested only one thing to her: negation of movement, suspension of continuity. (SS, p. 226)

Eisinger notes further that the absence of motion which Bowles describes in the African setting corresponds to the absence of life in the person of Port.<sup>17</sup> The sensation of paralysis and cold, which Port describes at the end of Book One as a "glacial deadness" (SS, p. 140) at the core of his being, is augmented here in this description of the landscape in which he lies dying. Despite the seeming hostility in the landscape which Kit observes, she also discovers in it an order, a continuum of time:

But as she stood there, momentarily a part of the void she had created, little by little a doubt slipped into her mind, the sensation came to her, first faint, then sure, that some part of this landscape was moving even as she looked at it. The whole monstrous star-filled sky was turning sideways before her eyes. It looked still as death, yet it moved. Every second an invisible star edged above the earth's line on that side, and another fell below on the opposite side. (SS, p. 226)

The sky itself is a symbol for the limit of one's existence, Time. At the moment of Port's death his semiconsciousness pierces the delicate fabric of the sheltering sky and takes repose (SS, p. 226). At the end of the novel as Kit, now suffering a mental disintegration, is placed on board the plane for Oran, she stares into the sky:

Before her eyes was the violent blue sky—nothing else. Someone once had said to her that the sky hides the night behind it, shelters the person beneath from the horror that lies above. Unblinkingly she fixed the solid emptiness and the anguish began to move in her. At any moment the rip can occur, the edges fly back, the giant maw will be revealed. (SS, p. 312)

The rain-soaked landscape in *Let It Come Down* is violent and menacing only when Dyar is not in tune with the time. For then it proves to be gentle and reassuring. And in *Up above the World* the heavy

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fog and the wilderness of the isolated mountain retreat where the Slades are held captive threaten to invade the house itself.

Distant drums are heard at various points in each of the novels. The sound provides the landscape with another dimension and is itself a metaphor for the continuity of time. The drums maintain the rhythmic heartbeat of life, as it were, regardless of Port's and Kit's attempts to distort it. Kit has heard the drums throughout the novel, but only when she is escaping from Belqassim's prison does she feel a part of them, a kinship with them. Nelson Dyar listens to the drums beating a "peculiar and breathless rhythm" (*LICD*, p. 284); later during a flagellation ritual he becomes acutely aware of the drums:

With the shortening of the phrases the music had become an enormous panting. It had kept every detail of syncopation intact, even at its present great rate of speed, thus succeeding in destroying the listeners' sense of time, forcing their minds to accept the arbitrary one it imposed in its place. (*LICD*, p. 286)

And for Lee Veyron the "insistent drums were an unwelcome reminder of the existence of another world, wholly autonomous, with its own necessities and patterns" (*SH*, p. 319). The landscape, then, simply asserts itself by its very existence and only becomes malevolent to those persons out of tune with it. What Port experiences in his dream are the benevolent possibilities of a landscape to a person reconciled to its existence.

Port's snapping off of his incisors pertains specifically to the relationship between one's existence in time and the means by which one gives that existence essence. Quite literally, the incisors have a very necessary function in the cutting of food. Curiously enough, the symbol for incisor is "I"; this connotes the personal "I," the maintenance of whose very existence is dependent upon action. In Book Two, "Fresh Meat and Roses," of *Let It Come Down*, there is an interesting rejoinder made by Dyar to Holland, who protests his wife's desire to feed some stray kittens. His rationale is that the kittens are going to die anyway, to which Dyar responds, "So are you, Holland. But in the meantime you eat, don't you?" (*LICD*, p. 139). And a little later during his walk home Dyar ponders the question:

What Holland had said had started him off, feeling rather than thinking, but Holland had not said enough, had not followed through. "Here I am and something's going to happen." No connection. He said to Holland: "You're going to die, too, but in the meantime you eat." No connection whatever, and yet it was all connected. It was all a part of the same thing. (*LICD*, p. 171)

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To be sure, it is all a part of the same thing. The "here I am" is the proclamation of existence and the "eating in the meantime" is the action which sustains that life and provides the essence of that existence. Port's action in his dream of breaking off his incisors symbolizes his destruction of his means of ever "becoming," hence, his realization in the dream that "it was too late." Note, too, that the unconscious action of breaking off the incisors takes place in a brief moment of retrospection: the Now is sacrificed and the consequences are irrevocable; the intensity of Port's sobs lends a pathos to his unsuccessful quest.

The vehicle of his dream, the train, is also a metaphor for Life and connotes Port's passive relationship to Life; he is riding along being acted upon. This is Port's life-style, and it is so for reasons of expediency and comfort:

As he watched the heat-covered landscape unfold, his thoughts took an inward turn, dwelt briefly on the dream that still preoccupied him. At the end of a moment, he smiled; now he had it. The train that went always faster was merely an epitome of life itself. The unsureness about the "no" and the "yes" was the inevitable attitude one had if one tried to consider the value of that life, and the hesitation was automatically resolved by one's involuntary decision to refuse participation in it. He wondered why it had upset him; it was a simple, classic dream. The connections were all clear in his head. Their particular meaning with regard to his own life scarcely mattered. For in order to avoid having to deal with relative values, he had long since come to deny all purpose to the phenomenon of existence—it was more expedient and comforting. (SS, p. 174)

The desperate feeling that Kit experiences when she boards the train with Tunner speaks of the desperation with which she approaches life as well as her general uneasiness with regard to trains. Kit, too, is passive while on the train: "It seemed to her that the motion of the train kept pushing her toward him" (SS, p. 82). Her wanderings through the fourth-class compartment lend credibility to the analogy between the train and life. Here, too, there is an emphasis on time. Kit is literally being moved through time and space, but she does not feel aware of it:

She was not conscious of time passing; on the contrary, she felt that it had stopped, that she had become a static thing suspended in a vacuum. Yet underneath was the certainty that at a given moment it would no longer be this way—but she did not want to think of that, for fear that she should become alive once more, that time should begin to move again, and that she should be aware of the endless seconds as they passed. (SS, p. 86)

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Nelson Dyer's need to "do" something is quite evident in *Let It Come Down*. Eisinger contends that Dyer makes a greater effort of directing his life by exerting his will and making choices than any other characters in Bowles's fiction.<sup>18</sup> However, Hassan adds that when Dyer acts, he does so in lurid and pointless spasms, and his actions reject all ideas of order and value.<sup>19</sup> Having absconded with smuggled monies Dyer considers the personal consequences of his actions:

"I wanted to do this," he told himself. It had been his choice. He was responsible for the fact that at the moment he was where he was and could not be elsewhere. . . . And he expected now to lead the procession of his life, as the locomotive heads the train, no longer to be a helpless incidental somewhere in the middle of the line of events, drawn one way and another without the possibility or even the need of knowing the direction in which he was heading. (*LICD*, p. 241)

Time is the central issue here as it is throughout Bowles's work; Paul Bowles has an almost pathological regard for life, and for his characters, time is quite literally of the essence (*LICD*, p. 75). The context in which the sentence "Time is of the essence" appears is a cocktail party during a discussion concerning the leakage of sterling in Tangier; a guest suggests that it is only a matter of time before the leakage will be stopped. Connotatively, the sterling may also represent "value." As such, the essence of time assumes yet another level of significance. The very boundaries of life are defined and limited by time. The only manner in which one can, with even the faintest glimmer of certainty, maintain that life is by action, self-generated action. The medium through which one acts is time. In *The Sheltering Sky* time is distorted and stifled. In Hassan's discussion of the existential pattern of fiction, he observes what he terms "demonic time," time which is destructive and serves to eventuate defeat.<sup>20</sup> In *The Sheltering Sky* time future does not grow out of time present, just as Port and Kit Moresby's successful achievement of their goals does not proceed from their quest. Instead, their passivity invites a corrosion by time.

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Evans, "Paul Bowles and the Natural Man," *Recent American Fiction*, ed. Joseph Waldmeir (Boston: Houghton, 1963), p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky* (New York: New Directions, 1949), pp. 11–12. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as SS.

<sup>3</sup> Evans, "Paul Bowles and the Natural Man," p. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Bowles, *Up above the World* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), p. 101.

"TEA IN THE SAHARA"

<sup>5</sup> John Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation*, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Spider's House* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 231. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *SH*.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), p. 225.

<sup>10</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, II.ii. 35–39, in *Shakespeare: Complete Plays and Poems*, ed. William Allan Nielson (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton, 1942), p. 1192.

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Woman*, Text F, 11.180–85, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton, 1957), p. 486.

<sup>12</sup> Chester Eisinger, *Fiction of the Forties* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 285.

<sup>13</sup> Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 87.

<sup>14</sup> David D. Galloway, *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1966), p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Bowles, *Let It Come Down* (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 269. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *LICD*.

<sup>16</sup> Eisinger, *Fiction of the Forties*, p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>19</sup> Hassan, *Radical Innocence*, p. 87.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

# Paul Bowles and Edgar Allan Poe: The Disintegration of the Personality

WAYNE POUNDS

On several occasions in his career as a writer Paul Bowles has paid tribute to the influence of Poe on his work, but it is in the stark, reiterated design of Bowles's early fiction that his heritage from Poe seems especially direct and striking. In the novels, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949) and *Let It Come Down* (1952), and in the stories collected in *The Delicate Prey* (1950) and *The Time of Friendship* (1967), the Western pilgrim abroad confronts a violent destiny in which he becomes the prey of the primitive forces which his odyssey arouses.<sup>1</sup> These forces may be external, embodied in alien peoples and hostile landscapes, or internal, aroused from the repressed areas of his own psyche.

*The Delicate Prey*, Bowles's first collection of stories, carries the dedication, "for my mother, who first read me the stories of Poe." In his autobiography, *Without Stopping* (1972), Bowles recalls the period of his life, at about age eight, to which the dedication refers:

I remember . . . the combination of repugnance and fascination I felt at hearing the stories of Poe. I could not read them aloud; I had to undergo them. Mother's pleasant low voice and thus, by extension, her personality took on the most sinister overtones as she read the terrible phrases. If I looked at her, I did not wholly recognize her, and that frightened me even more. It was in this period that I began to call out in my sleep and enact lengthy meaningless rituals, eyes open but unconscious, while Mother and Daddy stood watching, afraid to speak or touch me.<sup>2</sup>

Although the above passage was written late in Bowles's career, testimonials to Poe's importance to him are present from early youth. In a letter written while he was at the University of Virginia in 1928, at the

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age of seventeen, Bowles compares himself to Poe in respect to their indifference to routine success in study, and in a letter of about a year later he discusses ideas for setting some of Poe's lyrics to music.<sup>3</sup> In 1964, when asked in an interview if Poe had influenced his work, Bowles responded, "Undoubtedly. Anything you read over and over as a child is an influence."<sup>4</sup> In a 1975 interview Bowles substantially repeats the account given in his autobiography: "I remember my mother used to read me Edgar Allan Poe's short stories before I went to sleep at night. . . . It wasn't very good for sleeping—they gave me nightmares. Maybe that's what she wanted, who knows? Certainly what you read during your teens influences you enormously."<sup>5</sup>

The influence in question is not a simple one of borrowing characters, settings, plots, or manifest subject material—in fact, this kind of influence is scarcely discernible at all—but rather a complex sharing of sensibility, obsessive themes, and concern with the registration of extreme states of consciousness. Poe is "absolutely concerned with the disintegration-process of his own psyche," D. H. Lawrence observes. He records the "disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness. . . . Poe had a pretty bitter doom. Doomed to seethe down his soul in a great continuous convulsion of disintegration, and doomed to register the process." When Lawrence then asserts that "the human soul must suffer its own disintegration *consciously*,"<sup>6</sup> he raises the question of Poe's conscious understanding of the psychomachias his most memorable stories record.

But it would be irresponsible to quote D. H. Lawrence and unwise to speak of self-division in Poe without stopping to note that Lawrence's view of Poe has been out of fashion for the last ten years—roughly the period of the "Poe renaissance" in literary criticism signaled by the advent of the *Poe Newsletter* (now *Poe Studies*). The older view has been replaced, at least as a trend in criticism, by an emphasis on Poe as a conscious craftsman, ironist, and occultist.<sup>7</sup> Insofar as this emphasis has driven the stake into the image of Poe as a horror-haunted man, it has served as a salutary exorcism, but it should be noted that it does not repudiate the seminal criticism of Richard Wilbur and Allen Tate, whose work built directly on Lawrence's insights and in turn made possible the unsurpassed full-length studies of Patrick F. Quinn and, later, Daniel Hoffman. Although the stress on Poe as a conscious craftsman might in theory seem to lead to the concept of an integrated authorial presence in his work, in fact the thesis of the divided self in Poe's work, though no longer emphasized, has not lost its critical acceptance. It is a working assumption, occasionally explicit, in two

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book-length representatives of the current critical trend by G. R. Thompson and David Ketterer.<sup>8</sup> In relying on the older tradition of Poe criticism, then, my own position is that it has not been superseded and that its image of Poe reflects a sensibility which is a cultural property, part of the literary tradition whose heirs receive it and make it new.

One difference in sensibility between Poe and Bowles may be affirmed at the outset, that in relation to the goal which Lawrence calls the destruction of the old ego, or the old consciousness, Bowles, writing a hundred years later, is of course a more conscious artist. It is not certain that Poe fully understood, at least in a way that he could clearly articulate, the significance of the horrors which, with whatever effect in view, he so carefully and consciously contrived.<sup>9</sup> Allen Tate—who follows Lawrence in this respect, asserts that Poe “discovered our great subject, the disintegration of the personality”; but Tate adds this distinction:

Poe, as a critical mind, had only a distant if impressive insight into the disintegration of the modern personality; and . . . this insight was not available to him as an imaginative writer, when he had to confront the human situation as a whole man. He was the victim of a disintegration that he seems only intermittently to have understood.<sup>10</sup>

Cultural repression in Poe's instance seems to have been severe. He might know his own feelings of attraction and revulsion, and even take up an ironical distance from them, as recent criticism attests was his practice,<sup>11</sup> but he could not wholly explain them except through the rosy lenses of faculty psychology.<sup>12</sup>

Bowles's lucid understanding of the strategy of his own fiction is manifest in a statement quoted by Lawrence D. Stewart from a conversation tape-recorded in 1969:

The destruction of the ego has always seemed an important thing. I took it for granted that that was what really one was looking for in order to attain knowledge and the ability to live. . . . It's the stripping away of all the things that differentiate one person from another person. By stripping them away one arrives at a sort of basic working truth which will help one to go on.<sup>13</sup>

Such stripping is the painful, sometimes “ghastly process” Lawrence identifies in Poe. Bowles's comment on the theme points to the use of landscape to externalize states of feeling, a central strategy of his fiction: “The only effort worth making is the one it takes to learn the geography of one's own nature. But there is seldom enough energy

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even for that. . . . The act of dying must be longed for as the ultimate attainment.”<sup>14</sup>

The disintegration of personality is the ultimate attainment of the journeys which structure the narratives of Bowles’s first novel, *The Sheltering Sky*, and Poe’s single novel-length fiction, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Geography, understood as the externalization of human nature, is the informing metaphor. This is the psychological function of landscape implicit when Lawrence speaks of the “spirit of place” and “the pitch of extreme consciousness that Poe, Melville, Hawthorne, Whitman reached.”<sup>15</sup> Edwin Fussell specifies the meaning of the metaphor when he observes of Charles Brockden Brown, “he was perhaps the first American writer to suspect that the West might more profitably be defined as a condition of the soul than a physiographical region.”<sup>16</sup> The narratives of *The Sheltering Sky* and *Arthur Gordon Pym* are organized around an identical motif, the journey that passes through psychically charged landscapes to attain a knowledge that is destructive of the questing self.<sup>17</sup> That the knowledge sought and the voyage to attain it are forbidden is a fundamental part of their attraction—the attraction Poe named “perverseness.”

The quest for annihilation has its impetus in radical self-division. The principal characters in much of Poe’s and Bowles’s fiction represent extreme instances of that cultural malaise which T. S. Eliot, as early as 1919, diagnosed as dissociation of sensibility. The artist in whom is separated, however incompletely, the man who thinks and the man who feels may express the separation by assigning the sundered faculties to distinct characters—which is part of the narrative strategy of *The Sheltering Sky* and *Pym*. W. H. Auden very early noted the strategy of self-division in *Pym*,<sup>18</sup> a work which Lawrence, though he notices the motif elsewhere in Poe, does not mention. Auden’s hint broke the ground for such psychological readings as those of Richard Wilbur and Daniel Hoffman. The former writes, “The typical Poe story occurs within the mind of a poet; and its characters are not independent personalities, but allegorical figures representing the warring principles of the poet’s divided nature.”<sup>19</sup>

Dramatizing the divisions of the self in discrete characters may be therapeutic, one way the writer has of attaining for himself in the creative act a temporary rejoining of those faculties which in himself he feels to be severed. This pattern in Poe’s fiction leads Hoffman to assert:

what lends Poe’s enterprise its garish grandeur is his heroic effort to rejoin those faculties which in himself he felt so fatally to be

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sundered. If he represents . . . the dissociation of sensibility *in extremis*, at the same time he offers us his heroic effort to unify those flaws in the ramparts of his being.<sup>20</sup>

Bowles makes explicit the value of such strategy for himself when he says, surveying his work:

I can see that a lot of my stories were definitely therapeutic. . . . I needed to clarify an issue for myself, and the only way of doing it was to create a fake psychodrama in which I could be everybody.<sup>21</sup>

The shape and goal of the respective journeys recounted in *The Sheltering Sky* and *Pym* are determined by the inner divisions of the central self in each narrative. *The Sheltering Sky* portrays the self-destructive odyssey of three Americans into the Sahara Desert shortly after World War II. The three characters, like the principal three of *Pym*, represent aspects of a single self. Just as in *Pym* Augustus and Peters may be understood as the social and the atavistic phases of Pym's self,<sup>22</sup> so in *The Sheltering Sky* Tunner and Kit are phases of Port's self, the one purely physical, the other (Kit, Port's wife) atavistic.

The foremost thematic continuity between the two novels is the drive of Port and Pym, both consciously yearning for the annihilation the journey potentially entails, to penetrate an ultimate West—a vast area, hostile and unknown, which they associate with an ultimate knowledge. The Sahara of *The Sheltering Sky*, like the South Seas and Polar regions of *Pym*, is a limitless desert—"desert" in the older sense in which it means "wilderness," an area without civilized humanity. Both areas, by the defining attitudes of the explorers, are West. Pym and Port readily think of themselves as pioneers, each undergoing something of the metamorphosis traditional to the role; they embody the perennial relevance of Crèvecoeur's question, "What then is the American, this new man?"<sup>23</sup>—though Pym and Port pioneer in the wilderness itself rather than in Crèvecoeur's pastoral middle ground, and their metamorphosis, perhaps as a consequence, is regressive rather than positive.

The deserts are areas of unrelieved light whose flat featureless vistas are associated with the possibility of an absolute knowledge and the lure of self-annihilation. The Sahara crops up in *Pym* as a metaphor for the ocean, or more generally for destructive experience; and the ocean is used in *The Sheltering Sky* as a metaphor for the desert. Given the popular Arabian exoticism of Poe's day, it is understandable that Pym should dream of his ocean voyage in terms of the greatest known desert expanse: "I stood, naked and alone, amid the burning sand

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plains of Zahara. At my feet lay crouched a fierce lion of the tropics."<sup>24</sup> Likewise, it is not surprising that Port and Kit, as they travel south, should see the Sahara as an ocean "broken here and there by sharp crests of rock that rose above the surface like the dorsal fins of so many monstrous fish. . . ." <sup>25</sup> The comparisons are the common stock of the travel reports and fiction of both eras.

Pym longs for destruction and explicitly imagines its nature. Survival of the boating accident narrated in Chapter 1, in which Pym and Augustus have their skiff dismasted by a storm and run down by a passing whaler, awakens in Pym a longing for still greater wreckage. "It might be supposed that a catastrophe such as I have just related would have effectually cooled my incipient passion for the sea," Pym reports. "On the contrary, I never experienced a more ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator than within a week after our miraculous deliverance." Pym is very clear about what he longs for:

[Augustus] most strongly enlisted my feelings in behalf of the life of a seaman, when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair. For the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires—for they amounted to desires—are common . . . to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men . . . I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfill. (III, 18)

Allen Tate's description of Poe in "The Angelic Imagination" perfectly fits Pym: "He is progressively mastered by one great idea, deeper than any level of conscious belief and developing to the end of his life at an ever increasing rate, until he is engulfed by it. It is his own descent into the maelstrom."<sup>26</sup>

The Sahara Desert through which Port and Kit Moresby and their friend Tunner travel in *The Sheltering Sky* is a region perhaps even more desolate than the South Seas. On the floating wreck of the *Grampus*, the plight of the stricken voyagers is relieved by an occasional Galapagos turtle or the barnacles of the hull when the hulk rolls over; but in the Sahara, for all that there are scattered towns containing a few Europeans in French military outposts, there is no relief, for it is not so much the landscape that persecutes as the hostile forces within the individual, which the landscape objectifies. The principal feature of the desert, as sight unhindered in any direction extends to the horizon, is

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the sky. "The desert is the protagonist," Bowles explains; "I wanted to tell . . . what the desert can do to us," and he identifies the desert and the sky—"It's all one: they're both the same, part of nature."<sup>27</sup> The desert as protagonist gradually comes to dominate the characters' minds. Port journeys through increasing consciousness of it as far south as Sba; there, as he dies in the confinement of a makeshift hospital room, he explores the geography of his expiring consciousness, unaware of anything outside. Kit's journey, especially toward the end, is wholly under the dominance of the desert, a world of pure sensation and a landscape oppressively real, stifling her conscious processes, stripping her even of language, and rendering her as passive as Pym and Peters carried along into the chasm.

The deeper Port moves into the desert, the further he moves into himself, the more clearly he is the victim of a hostile consciousness and aware of the destruction at the end of his quest. At Boussif, a first stop after leaving Oran for the south, he begins to think "of the silences and emptinesses that touched his soul" and to wish that Kit, whom silence and emptiness terrify, "would be touched in the same way as he by solitude and the proximity to infinite things" (SS, p. 100). Two days later, on the bus to Ain Krorfa, he reflects that his expedition with Kit from New York has been a flight "into the unknown" (SS, p. 105). "He had hopes of being able to continue southward," though no information about travel conditions is available and official bulletins warn against "such pioneering," strongly admonishing travelers not to undertake land trips into any part of French Africa. "In a sense this state of affairs pleased him, it made him feel that he was pioneering—he felt more closely identified with his great grandparents, when he was rolling along out here in the desert . . ." (SS, p. 108).

The idea that at each successive moment he was deeper into the Sahara than he had been the moment before, that he was leaving behind all familiar things, this constant consideration kept him in a state of pleasureable agitation. (SS, p. 109)

Port's exhilaration mounts as the desert world becomes increasingly hostile and alien. When he loses his passport, last vestige of the social man, his momentary disorientation quickly gives way to feverish exaltation at the unknown quality of his next destination, El Ga'a, and he begins purposely to avoid information about traveling conditions. "It rather suited his fancy to be going off with no proof of his identity to a hidden desert town about which no one could tell him anything" (SS, p. 169). He is content to know only that the town is isolated and unfrequented by Europeans. Kit remarks the "febrile eagerness of his

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manner"; he is "unaccountably exhilarated" (SS, pp. 174, 176). By the time Port and Kit reach El Ga'a, Port is mortally ill with typhoid, and in his utter bodily debility, with his ties to the physical environment loosening, his journey turns increasingly inward. He begins to perceive the pattern of his life with the same clarity Pym knew in advance in contemplating his ocean journey. Port sees that through all the apparent twists of his past life, "it had been one strict, undeviating course inland to the desert, and now he was very nearly at the center" (SS, p. 198).

Like Port's, Pym's desire for annihilation is allied to a view of himself as a pioneer and closely tied to a vision of the forbidding character of the regions he hopes to explore. In the hold of the *Grampus*, where he suffers "premature interment," his reading of Lewis and Clark's journal of exploration leads him to visions not only of the Saharan tiger quoted earlier but of "deserts limitless, and of the most forlorn and awe-inspiring character" (III, 33, 28). At the end of Chapter 16, in which Pym reviews for the reader all earlier known explorations of the South Polar regions, he expresses "feelings of most intense interest" at the wide field that "lay before us for discovery" to the south. When in the next chapter the Captain of the *Jane Guy* lacks zeal to push further south, Pym hotly presses upon him the expediency of persevering. "So tempting an opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to the Antarctic continent had never yet been afforded to man. . . ." Pym hopes to be instrumental "in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention." Part of Pym's metamorphosis is an increasing mastery of objective detail, a power perhaps attributable to Peter's emergence as a supporting atavistic force;<sup>28</sup> but even this power swoons helplessly before the irresistible vortex of the Pole and only momentarily slows the overall pattern of regression.

*Pym* is a fusion of "the themes of life in the wilderness and life on the ocean," Edwin Fussell argues. "Symbolically, due South is the 'unknown,' the 'absolute,' or 'death'; allegorically, it is a displaced West."<sup>29</sup> The ultimate secret, which Fussell rightly identifies with extinction, and toward which Pym is being carried, is clearly stated by the narrator of another of Poe's voyage tales, "MS. Found in a Bottle": "we are hurrying on to some exciting knowledge—some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction. Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself" (II, 14). His last surmise proves correct, and there at the pole swirls the great vortex, hinted at in the maps of Mercator and sketched again in the aqueous imaginings of the

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notorious Symmes, where the waters of ocean rush into the bowels of the earth. Ten years later, in *Eureka* (1848), Poe sets out his fundamental thesis, which Pym's destiny so dramatically enacts: "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation" (XVI, 185–86).

Pym and Peters unconsciously seek the original unity of the first thing. Their quest is regressive because unity lies in their origins, and it is annihilating because ultimate origins involve the union of the organic with the inorganic. Hoffman points out that the formula dramatized in *Pym* and celebrated in *Eureka* precisely anticipates Chapter 5 of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he specifies the

final goal of all striving [as] an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity had at one time or another departed.

. . . [If] everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that "*the aim of all life is death*" and, looking backwards, that "*inanimate things existed before living ones.*"<sup>30</sup>

Pym recognizes that his destiny is determined by his desire for annihilation (III, 17–18); Hoffman is only updating the terminology when he says, "Pym's destiny is of course seated in his unconscious. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

In a movement parallel to Pym's voyage to the Pole, Port, as he approaches the center which will prove to be his death, begins a pioneering exploration of the geography of his inner nature. Like Pym, he is pulled along volitionless by psychic currents into the bowels of the earth (the imagery is the same). As he lies dying, it seems to him that the process of thinking becomes

more mobile; he followed the course of thoughts because he was tied on behind. Often the way was vertiginous, but he could not let go. There was no repetition in the landscape; it was always new territory and the peril increased constantly. . . . It was an existence of exile from the world. (SS, p. 222)

His movement through inner space brings him to a final barrier, "the thin sky stretched across to protect him. Slowly the split would occur, the sky draw back, and he would see what he never had doubted lay behind advance upon him with the speed of a million winds" (SS, p. 233). At an early stage of their desert trek, to Kit's inquiry as to what the sky shelters them from, he had responded, "Nothing, I suppose. Just darkness. Absolute night" (SS, p. 101).

In his final flight Port makes an inventory of the chaos of absolute night: "it was gigantic, painful, raw and false, it extended from one side

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of creation to the other, there was no telling where it was; it was everywhere" (SS, p. 222). Finally he sees chaos as a great bursting cloaca, the dissolution of the organic order before the internal pressure of waste. Visions of himself lying "impaled, his bleeding entrails open to the sky" (SS, p. 232), yield to the final glimpse of the sky as the outermost physical tissue, whose piercing, like the imagined piercing of his bowels, spells the disappearance of the world of forms. He sees

the spots of raw bright blood on the earth. Blood on excrement. The supreme moment, high above the desert, when the two elements, blood and excrement, long kept apart, merge. A black star appears, a point of darkness in the night sky's clarity. Point of darkness and gateway to repose. Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose. (SS, p. 235).

Although the sky up to this point in the novel, and again afterward, is usually imaged as a hard dome, white as the Polar seas around the chasm in *Pym*, in Port's death visions it is a porous cortex beyond which being is absorbed in darkness. The sky is an extension of the desert, and in penetrating it Port fulfills his earlier insight: his life has indeed been "one strict, undeviating course inland to the desert" and its center.

The nihilism of Port's quest, a very rationally ordered quest framed in terms of an absolute of knowledge, is continued in Kit's solitary wanderings, which begin with his death. Although her goal, like his, is destruction, its terms are physical and sensual rather than intellectual, corresponding to the intellect-feeling split the two characters represent. In *Pym* the death of Augustus three-fifths of the way through signals a like point in the self's movement away from civilization. It is the stage described by Kafka in the epigraph to the third and final book of *The Sheltering Sky*, the book devoted to Kit's wanderings: "From a certain point onward there is no longer any turning back. That is the point that must be reached." Within the atavistic self uncovered by the destruction of the civilized ego, there is no complementary will to, and thus no possibility to re-create the original self's autonomy. There is no longer any turning back.

Kit's failure to find any value other than sensual gratification in her life in the Arab community to which her wanderings bring her represents, like Pym and Peter's harrowing sojourn on Tsalal, the failure of primitivism as a refuge for those who reject their own culture. Q. B. Hardison has described *The Sheltering Sky* as "savage pastoral," a term that fits *Pym* perhaps equally well. "Civilization is the most obvious villain," he writes; "It has driven a wedge between the minds and the instincts of the characters."<sup>32</sup> "Primitivism," as these novels define it, is

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the lure of a culture that is not only different but by its relative technological simplicity may be considered as anterior (sometimes inferior as well, as in Pym) to the individual's own culture, which he identifies with civilization and repression.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Kit fails to enter into the Arab life, or to penetrate to any significant extent the barriers of language and culture. Port earlier in the novel diagnoses the failure he senses in his and Kit's relation to the civilized life they are fleeing: "We've never managed, either or us, to get all the way into life" (SS, p. 101). Kit, for her part, gets no further into the life of the desert dwellers than she had into civilized life. The sought-for primitive is, as E. H. Davidson says, "a vast complexity into which later civilized man could not penetrate." He describes the failure in Pym's relation to the natives of Tsalal: "Primitivism was itself a form of civilization, vastly different from but not lower [or more accessible] than what Pym had left behind in New England."<sup>34</sup> Pym's case, however, is different from Kit's in that the Tsalalians never are attractive to him; they remain simply the ugly projections of an imagination that has regressed to anal fantasies. What Pym finds attractive is the white negation that lies just beyond the blackness of Tsalal. In this respect he is like Port rather than Kit—Port, who must pass through the horrors of the bursting cloaca to reach the repose he imagines behind the white membrane of the sky.

It may be helpful to sketch briefly some of the Poesque patterns of violence which pervade Bowles's work from the early stories of *The Delicate Prey* (which were actually written before *The Sheltering Sky*, though published after) to the most contemporary ones of *Things Gone and Things Still Here* (1977). The "effect" of horror is achieved through concentrated evocation of states of mind as the meaningful center of narrative structure. Comparison, for example, could well be made between the three stages of waking scrupulously detailed in the second paragraph of "The Pit and the Pendulum" with the very similar three-stage process described in Port's waking in the single long paragraph which constitutes Chapter 1 of *The Sheltering Sky*. In both passages the initial waking movement is from disorientation in vast regions of nonbeing, through a growing need for spatial and temporal orientation, to an immediate revulsion from the sense of confinement produced by waking consciousness, an oppressive feeling that amounts to temporary paralysis. This is the feeling of what Port calls "the finiteness of life," "the terrible precision that we hate so much" (SS, p. 238).

The disintegration of personality is a primary preoccupation

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throughout Bowles's work and has two ramifications. First, the typical pattern of self-division in Bowles's characters is presented as a predatory animal-like violence beneath a compliant behavioral shell that represents the self's outer acquiescence to the civilizing demands of the superego. With the disintegration of the superego upon contact with a primitive force—typically mediated by drugs, landscapes, or alien dark-skinned people—the potential violence of the repressed inner self is realized in action.<sup>35</sup> More than half of the stories of *The Delicate Prey* fall into this pattern. Outstanding are "At Paso Rojo," "The Echo," and "A Distant Episode."<sup>36</sup> The first Poe story that comes to mind here is again *Pym*, which gathers together such fugitive primitive elements from the tales as the violent animal/Negro ("Murders in the Rue Morgue"), drugs (opium in "Ligeia," alcohol in "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Black Cat"), and "desert" landscapes (the voyage tales); but "William Wilson" is of course the most clearly drawn example of the persecution of instinct by conscience, resulting in the destruction of both. Here, too, must be included Bowles's second novel, *Let It Come Down* (1952), where the primitive influences of drugs and landscape dissolve the repressive bands of civilized restraint in the novel's protagonist and bring to the surface a savage self whose instincts, so long repressed, act out in blood a fantasy of revenge on the persecuting figures remembered from childhood.

Such festering, poisonous family relationships are the other ramification of the theme of self-destruction, as very often the urge toward self-murder is seen to be an internalization of the internecine violence experienced in infancy. The parental phase of the nuclear family is of course an unwritten chapter in Poe's fiction, but the silence itself, notoriously, speaks volumes. As regards the father, apart from the several narrators who lack one and the several characters who lack surnames, the stories which most openly raise the paternal specter are "The Tell-Tale Heart" and *Pym*, whose sequence of revolts against the father has been well described by Patrick F. Quinn.<sup>37</sup> The misogyny of Poe's tales is too familiar to bear reiteration here, but for Bowles's work—and, from this point of view, likewise for Poe's—the telling tale is "The Black Cat," where, from the ravaged perspective of the repressed inner self, the persecutory nature of the woman is most clearly felt, and where, from the point of view of the reader, the psychological mechanism of displacement (in this case, from woman to animal) most plainly protrudes. The misogyny of Bowles's tales emerges from portrayals of the warfare within the nuclear family and centers explicitly on the mother. The malice of the father is the theme of an

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early story like "Pages from Cold Point" as well as the childhood sections of Bowles's autobiography.<sup>38</sup> But more representative of the general thrust of his fiction are the ominous mother-figures, sometimes grotesque to the point of caricature, that include: the nameless woman in his first published story, "The Scorpion" (1945); Mrs. Lyle of *The Sheltering Sky*; Eunice Goode of *Let It Come Down*; Mrs. Rainmantle of *Up above the World* (1966); and the title character of "Doña Faustina" of *The Time of Friendship*. The compounded crimes of these and other mother-figures like them range from simple tyranny to hetero- and homosexual incest, infanticide, and cannibalism. Mrs. Rainwater is at last the victim of the matricidal wish throbbing in all of these stories when she is killed by her son.

Although such areas as these promise fruitful investigation, this essay has focused primarily on two novels. *Pym*, as Patrick Quinn asserts,<sup>39</sup> is a compendium of the themes of Poe's tales; similarly, *The Sheltering Sky* is a compendium of early Bowles—and, more importantly, represents the quintessence of Poe's influence. There is a chronological division in Bowles's work which may be roughly marked at about 1967, the publication date of his second major collection of stories, *The Time of Friendship*, which followed within one year of his fourth and last novel (*Up above the World*). It is in Bowles's work through 1967, when the characteristic protagonist is the Western pilgrim encountering a violent destiny, that the specter of Poe walks abroad—in patterns of internecine violence, in radical self-division and the breakdown of the ego, in the unrelenting concern to register states of mind from their most diurnal oscillations to their farthest and most frenzied pitch, and in the exploration of extreme states of mind externalized as geography.

Bowles's later work departs from this pattern in a single but crucial respect: the characters as well as the setting become primarily North African. During much of this later period, Bowles has been involved in collaborations with oral-tradition Moroccan storytellers—of whom the present representative, and perhaps the most important, is Mohammed Mrabet—and it may be that this experience reflects a growing identification with the Moroccan point of view.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, Bowles seems to have found in the Moslem and Berber culture of Morocco a framework of ritual and tradition in which violence and extreme states of mind form an integral part. He has thus been free, in a way that Poe never was, to abandon the cultural trappings of the gothic idiom. It is as though his first goal, "the destruction of the ego," has been accomplished. Classic American literature, from Fenimore Cooper to William Faulkner, has long dreamed but only very intermittently and

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ephemerally realized an identification with the alien Other—the dark figure present alike in *Pym* and in Bowles's work from the very start (e.g., "The Delicate Prey"). Bowles's apparent identification with the alien point of view in his collaborations with Mrabet and other Moroccans, as well as the evidence of his own later stories, points to one writer's realization of the cultural dream. Crèvecouer's question, "What is the American, this new man?" has yet to receive a final answer.

<sup>1</sup> After roughly 1967, stories about the Westerner abroad increasingly give way to stories largely North African in their characters as well as setting. A good discussion of the early phase is Ihab Hassan, "The Pilgrim as Prey," *Western Review* (Iowa City), 19 (1954), 23–36.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping: An Autobiography* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Two undated letters [1928, 1929] to Daniel Burns in the Paul Bowles Collection, Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin. I am grateful to Paul Bowles and the Humanities Research Center for permission to use this material. Bowles was a successful composer when he began publishing fiction in the mid 1940's.

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," *Mediterranean Review*, 1 (1971), 5. Earlier Bowles tells Evans that he chose to attend the University of Virginia "because Poe did" (p. 4). Though published in 1971, this interview in fact took place in 1964. See Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), p. 147, n. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Halpern, "Interview with Paul Bowles," *Tri Quarterly*, 33 (1975), 161.

<sup>6</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923; rpt. New York: Viking, 1961), p. 65.

<sup>7</sup> A good overview of the current position is provided by Stuart Levine's introductory essay to *The Short Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe: An Annotated Edition*, eds. Stuart and Susan Levine (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976). Levine's thesis asserts the occultist Poe.

<sup>8</sup> G. R. Thompson, *Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), pp. 17–18, 28. David Ketterer, *The Rationale of Deception in Poe* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 131, 221. Ketterer refers to the "Poe renaissance" represented by the founding of the *Poe Newsletter* (p. xii).

<sup>9</sup> So Daniel Hoffman concludes in *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), Ch. 12. My debt to Hoffman, Tate, Quinn, and Wilbur is larger than specific notes below may indicate.

<sup>10</sup> Allen Tate, *The Forlorn Demon: Didactic and Critical Essays* (Chicago: Regnery, 1953), p. 60. This work includes "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" and "The Angelic Imagination."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Thompson, whose own position is ambiguous. Initially he asserts that Poe "knew consciously from the first what he was about" but later amends this to say that the thesis of Poe's incomplete awareness is "valid in one dimension"

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but "underestimates Poe's awareness of the literary ideas of his times . . ." (*Poe's Fiction*, pp. 67, 161-62).

<sup>12</sup> On Poe's acceptance of faculty psychology, see Tate, *The Forlorn Demon*, p. 60; Hoffman, *Poe . . .*, p. 322; and Patrick F. Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), p. 167.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>14</sup> Undated manuscript fragment, Humanities Research Center.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence, *Studies in Classical American Literature*, pp. 5, viii.

<sup>16</sup> Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965), p. 9. The traditional concept of "West" in the European mind is reviewed by Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), Ch. 2. Especially pertinent are pp. 70-71, where he describes pastoral as an "analogue of psychic experience."

<sup>17</sup> Curiously, Bowles states that, while he has read *Pym*, he is not conscious of it having made any vivid impression on him. Conversation with the author, November 1976.

<sup>18</sup> W. H. Auden, Introduction to *Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Prose, Poetry, and Eureka* (New York: Holt, 1950), p. vii.

<sup>19</sup> "The House of Poe," in *Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robert Regan (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 117.

<sup>20</sup> Hoffman, *Poe . . .*, p. 322.

<sup>21</sup> Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," p. 10. Echoed in a later interview: Jeffrey Bailey, "The Art of Fiction," *Paris Review*, 81 (1981), 80.

<sup>22</sup> On Augustus as Pym's alter ego and social self, see Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (1958; rpt. New York: Knopf, 1970), p. 111; Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Dell, 1966), pp. 395-96; and Hoffman, *Poe . . .*, p. 264.

<sup>23</sup> "What Is an American?," *Letters from an American Farmer*. Edwin Fussell speaks of the tradition of metamorphosis in pioneering, *Frontier*, p. 148. The link between Crèvecoeur's question and D. H. Lawrence's expectation of "a new consciousness" to result from the American experience is readily apparent.

<sup>24</sup> *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (1902; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1965), III, 28. Parenthetical references in the text to Poe's work are to this edition and may be distinguished from other parenthetical references by the presence of a volume number.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky* (New York: New Directions, 1949), p. 99. Parenthetical references in the text are to this edition, cited as SS.

<sup>26</sup> Tate, *The Forlorn Demon*, p. 75. Pym's destructive drive is also discussed by Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, p. 194; and Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), p. 177.

<sup>27</sup> Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> A like objective power does not develop in Port at any point, perhaps because he never has the benefit of a close relationship with the instinctual aspect of himself embodied in Kit.

<sup>29</sup> Fussell, *Frontier*, pp. 149, 148.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. James Strachey (1928; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1959), p. 70. Hoffman, *Poe . . .*, p. 286.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

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<sup>32</sup> O. B. Hardison, "Reconsideration," review of *The Sheltering Sky*, *New Republic*, 173, 27 Sept. 1975, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Part of this definition paraphrases Roy Harvey Pearce, "Civilization and Savagism: The World of the Leatherstocking Tales," *English Institute Essays*, 1949, ed. Alan Downer (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 92-93.

<sup>34</sup> Davidson, *Poe*, p. 103.

<sup>35</sup> See my "Paul Bowles and *The Delicate Prey*: The Psychology of Predation," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 59 (1981), 620-33. The model of self-division here described is the same as that defined by R. D. Laing in *The Divided Self* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965). It is the dominant psychological pattern of Bowles's representative protagonists, as it is of many of Poe's. On the latter, see Sam B. Girgus, "Poe and R. D. Laing: The Transcendental Self," *Studies in Short Fiction*, 13 (1976), 299-309.

<sup>36</sup> Tennessee Williams first made the observation, "The theme is the collapse of the civilized 'Super Ego.'" "The Human Psyche—Alone," review of *The Delicate Prey*, *Saturday Review*, 33 (1950), 19-20.

<sup>37</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, pp. 176 ff.

<sup>38</sup> Bowles, *Without Stopping*, pp. 9-61. Mention should also be made of "The Frozen Fields," one of Bowles's most moving stories; also, *The Time of Friendship* (New York: Rinehart, 1967).

<sup>39</sup> Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe*, pp. 193, 200.

<sup>40</sup> This phase of Bowles's work has its beginning as far back as 1954. See Evans, "An Interview with Paul Bowles," p. 12.

# Release from Torment: The Fragmented Double in Bowles's *Let It Come Down*

MITZI BERGER HAMOVITCH

Paul Bowles, the author of a number of haunting short stories, four novels, the best-known of which is *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), poetry, travel books, and translations from the Arabic, is not as well known in this country as he should be, perhaps because he has lived for many years in Morocco—the “alien territory” that provides the background for much of his writing. The reader of post-World War II literature is familiar with his modernist themes of alienation, loneliness, and anxiety; what remains in the mind after reading much of Bowles's work is the seemingly unmerited harsh fate he metes out to his central characters, who are either self-destructive, like Port Moresby in *The Sheltering Sky*, or destroyed by others in deaths involving mutilation, torture, and madness, as seen, for example, in such stories as “A Delicate Prey,” “A Distant Episode,” and “The Hours after Noon.” In story after story, human frailties of obtuseness or self-indulgence result in calamity and horror. As Theodore Solotaroff writes, “Of the writers who devoted themselves to negation and despair, Bowles was probably the most . . . uncompromising.”<sup>1</sup> In this essay I plan to discuss the possible impetus for Bowles's demonic vision and the technical means by which he conveys it in much of his work, using as text his compelling novel *Let It Come Down* (1952).

The existential hero of the novel, Nelson Dyar (die-er? dire?), is a disaffected young American and a loner who has come to Morocco to transform himself into a “winner” instead of the “victim” he sees himself to be. He is a classic example of the hero beloved by writers of

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the 1950s—alienated man—“who even to himself . . . felt completely anonymous . . . it is difficult to care very much what is happening inside a person one does not know.” He thinks that by the mere assertion of his existence—“Here I am,” an expression he repeats from time to time—he will begin to feel the dead weight of his life lessened, and that the making of his choices, rather than those set by parental and societal expectations, will fill him with life and vigor. Like the hero of Sartre’s *Nausea*, he feels ill when he first arrives in Tangier; the omniscient author uses words like “numb,” “dead,” “heavy,” and “lifeless,” to describe Dyar’s feelings and lack of response. Others characterize him as empty and not in touch with life; as Daisy, the book’s most sympathetic character, says, “He has nothing, he wants nothing, and he is nothing.”<sup>2</sup>

The title of the book refers to metaphysical indifference, as symbolized by the constant rain which falls on saint and sinner alike; it refers also, as Bowles tells us in the Preface, to a line from *Macbeth* which has haunted him since he was a child, spoken by the assassin to Banquo, who remarks: “It will be rain tonight.” “Let it come down,” replies the murderer, just before bringing down the knife on his victim. The image underscores Bowles’s bleak view of civilization.

Bowles has ironically inverted the idea of romantic primitiveness by showing us a filthy, backward, and squalid Tangier, in which lives a “noble savage,” Thami, a Moroccan Moslem and small-time smuggler. He has renounced his family’s status and privilege in order to live with his sluttish wife and baby, in Emsallah, an area inhabited by only “laborers and servants.” Dyar’s path crosses Thami’s near the beginning of the novel. Their lives are soon intertwined, and, by the end, Thami lies dead, victim of Dyar’s seemingly unmotivated act of murder while under the influence of hashish. The novel describes the hero’s odyssey through self-discovery by showing the choices he makes, the last of which exhibits the ultimate in violence. The reader is left shocked and puzzled by the dramatic events toward the close of the novel, although the series of actions leading up to the catastrophe has been convincing.

Why did Dyar kill Thami? What mysterious confluence of emotions impelled such a seemingly random act? And what lies behind Dyar’s odd remark near the conclusion of the novel, “I’ve come back . . . Thami has stayed behind. I’m the only survivor . . . Thank God he hasn’t come with me . . . I never wanted him to know I was alive” (*LICD*, p. 285). The influence of the drug can be dismissed somewhat, since Bowles negates the power of the hashish to induce murder. “The kif [a hashish derivative] is simply the key which opens a door to some

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particular chamber of the brain that lets whatever was in there out. It doesn't put anything in. It doesn't supply the matter. It liberates whatever's in, that's all."<sup>3</sup>

It is likely that the answer to the puzzle can be found in the doppelgänger or double, a literary device initially used in the nineteenth-century German Romantic works of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Heinrich von Kleist, Jean Paul Richter, and others. In his book, *The Double in Literature*, Robert Rogers defines the literary double as "some sort of antithetical self—usually a guardian angel or tempting devil. Critics oriented toward psychology view the diabolic double, which predominates, as a character representing the unconscious instinctual drives."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to distinguish between overt doubles, as in Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson," or Oscar Wilde's "The Picture of Dorian Gray," in which the heroes and their doubles are mirror images; and latent doubles, where neither the author, the characters, nor the readers may be aware of doubling. Doubles can be simple or multiple, embodying in fragmentation, or decomposition, various aspects of a conflict within their creator. "When there are defects in personality structure, the personality may split up under stress, along fissures that may develop between love and hate; heterosexuality and homosexuality; masochism and sadism and so on."<sup>5</sup> Rogers adds that while "as a defense, [doubling] normally leads to disaster within the framework of the narrative, the author of such stories may be thought of as having served his defensive needs in a salubrious way, for example, Melville in 'Bartleby,' Henry James in 'The Jolly Corner,' Dostoyevsky in *The Idiot*, and other works"<sup>6</sup> (italics mine).

I believe that Paul Bowles is one of those writers for whom doubling provided psychological release. As will be shown later in the essay, it is clear from his autobiography *Without Stopping* that he suffered at times from almost unbearable anxiety. Through a fragmented double—his protagonist, Dyar, who enacts his hidden rage, aggression, and covert lust, and Dyar's companion, Thami, who is made to bear the brunt of these feelings—Bowles exorcises his demons for a time. Hanns Sachs has written about creativity and the unconscious, "Each character is a part of [the author's] mind, of his affects and most of all, of his own unconscious. . . ."<sup>7</sup> Bowles himself has said that one of his goals in writing is to "bring before a man his resurrected unconscious . . . in order to effect, ultimately . . . the highest degree of consciousness."<sup>8</sup>

My question asked earlier, concerning the seemingly unmotivated killing of Thami, on which turns the plot resolution, can perhaps be

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answered best by working backward through thoughts and events in Dyar's life—unreeling the tape of the mind as it were—to the sources of repressed feeling in his unconscious, as well as to the wellspring of creativity, the author's unconscious.

Dyar is in a strange country, isolated from the familiar social environment that would encourage conformism, and exposed to a variety of explosive and exotic situations: his theft of a large amount of money promises him longed-for freedom, his smoking kif and eating quantities of majoun [a cannabis jam], plunge him into confused and hallucinatory states of mind, and his identification with a self-mutilating Arab, slashing himself as he writhes in a trance, briefly seems to free his feelings, allowing him to believe that long-submerged needs are now being filled—he has become active, a doer, and, in his terms, a "winner." But it is only with the murder of Thami that he finally feels himself alive, that he has achieved "a place in the world, a definite status, a precise relationship with the rest of men. Even if it had to be one of open hostility, it was his, created by him" (*LICD*, p. 292).

Understanding the device of the fragmented double makes plain Dyar's elliptical dialogue at the end of the novel—"I've come back . . . Thami has stayed behind. I'm the only survivor. That's the way I wanted it" (*LICD*, p. 285). Dyar, as surrogate figure for Bowles, carries out for him his unacknowledged antisocial wishes, fears, thoughts, and associations, while Thami serves as the alter ego for Dyar, who, in a paranoid episode, sees him as a pursuer who must be killed if he, Dyar, is to survive. At the end, Dyar expresses his satisfaction that he is alive, as if the two had been pitted against each other in a struggle to the death.

Bowles has said that he had decided on the shocking dénouement before he wrote the novel. In order to avoid the problem of incredibility at the end, he had to plan the novel thoroughly down to the smallest detail.

- The whole thing was planned. It had to be; it was an adventure story, after all, in which the details had to be realistic. The work was completely surface-built, down to the details of the décor . . . it's a completely unreal story, and the entire book is constructed in order to lead [finally] to this impossible situation.<sup>9</sup>

Thami is a combination of "guardian angel" and "tempting devil." At first he is a protective figure, accompanying Dyar back to his hotel on the night they first meet to be sure that he is safe. He is the gracious host, as it were, to the visiting American in his (Thami's) native land; he lends him money, befriends him, and agrees to help Dyar in his escape

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from Tangier after the latter has stolen money from Wilcox and Ashcombe-Danvers, an act of which Thami is ignorant. Thami is a kind of mirror image of Dyar. He too is rebellious, detests his existing family—his older brothers—although he had dearly loved his father and felt abandoned when he died. Thami had been his favorite, but cannot seem to “fit in.” He hated Europeans and the “ignorance” and backwardness of the Moslems—and “he hated himself most of all. But fortunately he was unaware of that” (*LICD*, p. 44). Seeking a haven after his theft, Dyar hires the services of Thami and his boat, and Thami agrees to shelter Dyar in a vacant hut belonging to his in-laws in the mountains of Spanish Morocco. As a “tempting devil,” he assists Dyar’s illegal act, and is totally amoral when it comes to making money.

The feelings of rebellion and rage in Dyar and Thami originate in their creator. In *Without Stopping* we read:

At a very early age . . . I took for granted my father’s constant and unalloyed criticism. His mere presence meant misery; it was one of the unalterables of existence. Very early I understood that I would always be kept from doing what I enjoyed and forced to do that which I did not. The Bowles family took it for granted that pleasure was destructive, whereas engaging in an unappealing activity aided in character formation. Thus I became an expert in the practice of deceit.<sup>10</sup>

He writes that his father had hoped to be a concert violinist, but the father’s parents, considering this a “highly impractical ambition,” had vetoed his ambition, whereupon he “retaliated” by having a nervous breakdown. He stifled his desire and became a dentist in Jamaica, Long Island. When he suspected his only offspring of wanting to be a writer or musician, he responded with violent condemnation. Having introjected his father’s negative attitudes toward the creative personality, Bowles senior projected his feelings onto another ego, or double—his son. At the age of eight, Paul Bowles was beaten by his father, who suspected him of masturbation because he had locked himself in his room to draw pictures before breakfast, an act which he thought his father would disapprove. Bowles vowed to “devote his life to his destruction, even though it meant my own—,” an idea which preoccupied him for many years (*WS*, p. 45). (Here perhaps is a prefiguration of the Dyar-Thami relationship.) “[At] the age of nineteen I was astonished to find that I had just thrown a meat knife at my father. . . . ‘You can’t stand me because every time you look at me you realize what a mess you’ve made of me,’ I shouted. ‘But it’s not my fault I’m alive. I didn’t ask to be born!’ ” (*WS*, p. 19).

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He is angry too at his mother for infantile jokes at his expense: as a young child returning home after school to what he thought was an empty house, he saw what seemed to be a body hiding under a bed, only to discover it was his mother, who exploded with laughter at his shock and fright. "I wanted to see what would happen if I disappeared . . . you wouldn't like it much, would you?" His fear at hearing Poe's stories read aloud to him from the ages of two to eight also aroused anger in him at his mother:

Mother's pleasant, low voice and thus, by extension, her personality took on the most sinister overtones as she read the terrible phrases. If I looked at her, I did not wholly recognize her, and that frightened me even more. It was in this period that I began to call out in my sleep and to enact lengthy meaningless rituals, eyes open but unconscious, while Mother and Daddy stood watching afraid to speak or touch me. (WS, p. 33)

Anger and fear, then, characterize many of Bowles's memories of his childhood, the seedbed for the terrifying stories he has written.

Later, he felt that art and crime were "indissolubly" linked and that "the greater the art, the more drastic the punishment for it," since the artist supposedly was the enemy of society. Although he worked at mundane summer jobs and went to the University of Virginia after graduating from high school, he believed the integrity of his nature was being violated, to the point that one day, he entered his room with the express idea of doing "something explosive and irrevocable . . . there was a second I in me who had suddenly assumed command." His choice, he felt, was that of committing suicide or going abroad. The decision would be made by the toss of a coin. When the coin showed heads, he heaved a sigh of relief and carried out his plan of escape to Europe, leaving behind his old life and his father's rigid demands of behavior.

Having published some early poems in *transition*, as well as being impressed with the modernist writers who wrote for the magazine, Bowles went immediately to Paris, first visiting Gertrude Stein who, along with Alice Toklas, befriended the young man and rather regarded him as a sociological specimen.

I provided her . . . with a species then rare, now the commonest of contemporary phenomena, the American suburban child with its unrelenting spleen . . . I was the most spoiled, insensitive, and self-indulgent young man she had ever seen . . . "a manufactured savage!" (WS, p. 119)

Stein and Toklas suggested that Bowles spend some time in Tangier,

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where he could find sun every day and "break new ground." By this time, he was a protégé of Aaron Copland's, and the two embarked for Morocco, the first sight of which filled Bowles with great happiness and the feeling that he was drawing close to the solution of an "as-yet-unposed problem." Morocco would be his home in years to come, providing him with the "alien territory" which heightens the nightmare quality of much of his writing.

But first occurred his marriage to Jane Auer, a union of two highly gifted personalities—his, however, disciplined and hardworking, hers, regarded by some as perhaps the more original, but self-indulgent and obsessive. In her biography of Jane Bowles, *A Little Original Sin*, Millicent Dillon writes of the Bowleses' complicated sex life.<sup>11</sup> They had at first a heterosexual relationship but then Jane declared herself a lesbian and uninterested in continuing their sex life together. Bowles himself became enamored of the Arab, Ahmed Yacoubi, and later there were others.

Dyar's core passivity may be related to the writer's homosexuality. Dyar tends to drift into situations rather than deliberately to choose them. At the beginning of the novel he is described as the "only prey" of the waiting cabdrivers. On his way to a hotel, he decides to "let" the driver determine for him where he will stay. He accepts a check from Mme de Jouvenon, a Soviet agent, reluctantly, almost not of his own volition. "He really didn't want to spy for the Russians, but it was nice to have the money. The choice was already made, and he felt it was not he who had made it. Because of that, it was hard for him to believe that he was morally involved" (*LICD*, p. 170). Although he has a strong need to break out of his "cage," he feels a great abyss between the desire and the doing.

Once in the getaway boat, Dyar experiences the beginnings of paranoia—he is jumpy and feels he is being pursued by the law, and watched even by his accomplices, Thami and his Jilali boatsman. Worried and nervous about whether or not their escape will be effected, he lies back in the boat and falls into a reverie, going back in memory to a time when his mother had been all-important for him. He remembers the words of a song she had sung to him, words that seem inappropriate and incorrect, but the only words he remembers, "pickaninny," and "a little Alabama coon"; this song is the only one that had made him feel really happy. While he feels his mother's presence as protective, he also finds it threatening—"if he opened his eyes, there were her eyes looking at him, and that terrified him. With his eyes closed, there was nothing but his bed and her presence . . . that way there was no possible danger

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in the world" (*LICD*, p. 228). The feeling of being pursued, of eyes as being terrifying—even those of the beloved mother—becomes constant.

These are feelings of paranoia, a psychosis that is thought by many psychoanalysts to be clinically associated with repressed homosexuality. The paranoid feels himself drawn to another person of the same sex but because the attraction arouses too great an anxiety within him, he defends against the feeling by turning it into a reaction-formation—saying to himself, "I don't love him," or "I hate him," or perhaps the converse—"He hates me." This leaves him in the clear—"I am neither hateful nor homosexual." What is in his conscious mind are the feelings of hatred he has projected onto the other toward himself; what lies buried within the unconscious are the initial feelings of attraction he felt for the other.

Just as Dyar was both warmed by the memory of his mother's loving presence and terrified by her glance, which he saw as threatening, so too is he increasingly uncomfortable with the surrogate mother-figure of Thami. In the hut near Agla, in Spanish Morocco, Dyar is totally dependent on Thami to procure food and firewood for him, and to change money, because as a stranger he would be questioned by the village police. He begins to suspect Thami of trying to steal the money, of trying to poison his food, or of trying to notify the authorities of his whereabouts. In every noise of the wind and the rattling door, Dyar imagines a danger, a dissolution of the barrier between himself and the world outside.

Although his bouts of paranoia and resentment at being completely dependent on Thami are mingled with sporadic feelings of affection, Dyar cannot bear his lack of freedom. He decides to abandon his isolation, waiting "like a rat in a trap" for Thami to return. Two days earlier he had been in his cage of "cause and effect," dependent on others who held the "keys." Now no one stands in the way—with his newfound money he himself has the keys. He makes his way down to the village where he buys food, but when he leaves the restaurant he is still fearful that he is being followed, and in every stranger he sees a threat. To escape this imagined pursuit, he ducks into a café. There he witnesses an astounding exhibition of self-mutilation. In a circle of drummers,

something inexplicable was taking place almost at his feet. The man . . . pulled out a large knife . . . the sound of the chanted strophes of "Al-lah!" . . . had become two high walls between which the dancer whirled and leapt. . . . The man held up his bare arm. The blade glinted, struck at it on a down beat of the

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drum pattern. And again. And again and again, until the arm and hand were shining black . . . Dyar saw . . . the ecstatic face as an arm was raised to the mouth and the swift tongue began to lick the blood in rhythm. With the shortening of the phrases the music had become an enormous panting . . . thus succeeding in destroying the listeners' sense of time . . . in his mind he had moved forward from looking on to a kind of participation. . . . The mutilation was being done for him, to him; it was his own blood. . . . the man was dancing to purify all who watched. When the dancer threw himself to the floor with a despairing cry, Dyar knew that in reality it was a cry of victory, that spirit had triumphed. . . . Dyar sat perfectly still, savoring the unaccustomed sensations which had been freed within him . . . none of his fear was left. It had all been liberated by the past hour in the café. . . . Now whatever circumstance presented itself, he would find a way to deal with it. [Italics mine] (LICD, pp. 269-71)

This passage represents a major crisis in the novel, the moment when Dyar thinks he has truly succeeded in breaking out of his stifling, psychological cage. In this vivid masochistic scene, whereby the onlookers become voyeurs, ridding themselves of sexual and other unacceptable fantasies, so that they are "purified," some deeply repressed thought or wish in Dyar has been released. It takes but the drug to bring that wish to the fore, transforming the fantasy into reality. Here we see most plainly that the bondage is not economic, cultural, or sociological, but Dyar's sick and solitary self.

Dyar goes out to the plaza, smokes kif, and encounters Thami, who has become now, in his drugged thoughts, his savior and his boon companion. "You son of a bitch!" he cried, "laughing with pleasure, clapping Thami's shoulder several times . . ." They begin their climb up to the house, and halfway up, sit down to share a cake of majoun. A state of passivity, of inertia, of shadowy reverie overcomes them; the erstwhile rebels are to become blood brothers, then principals in a final act of murder and self-destruction.

Safely back in the hut, they eat and drink companionably, until both fall into a hashish stupor. Thami sings and dreams, Dyar laughs and hallucinates, each engrossed in his own thoughts and imaginings. Dyar arouses himself at one point for much-needed water, and as he staggers to the patio, he is diverted by the rattle of the door, which seems to him an enemy that must be silenced. In the village he had stolen a hammer and nail for just that purpose. To Dyar, in his paranoid and drugged confusion, the door becomes a symbol of a barrier that must be made firmer to keep the real world out; but beside

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him, he sees the body of Thami, the double, the "other," whom he suddenly and cloudedly identifies as the pursuer. Fear begins to gather inside him, and in childish regression a gush of meaningless nursery rhyme phrases pours out. "Many Mabel damn. Molly Daddy Lamb. Lolly diddle up-man. Dolly little Dan," he whispered, and then he giggled." Taking his hammer in his right hand and the nail in his left, he bangs the nail with all his might as far into Thami's ear as he can. This act suggests homosexual aggression, perhaps a denial in the force of the attack of the intensity of the covert attraction.

For the novel's scene of catastrophe, Bowles draws on the power of archetypal material. Dyar's final misguided blow for freedom echoes in ironic reversal several instances of the piercing of the head in the Old Testament, also in the context of freedom and subservience. In Exodus 21:6, after God's gift to Moses of the Ten Commandments, He sets forth the rules for the tribe, one of them being that "if a slave chooses to remain with his master after six years, his master shall bring him to the doorpost; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for life." The second reference occurs in Judges 4:21, in which the Israelite Jael achieves freedom from oppression for her people by driving a tent-pin into the skull of the sleeping Canaanite general, Sisera. Of this event, Deborah and Barak sing one of the great biblical songs of victory.

In the first instance, an individual willingly chooses subservience to an authoritative figure; in the second, a feminine figure achieves freedom by killing an oppressive force. In both cases, the result is self-fulfillment, either from the renewed assumption of "pleasurable" shackles or from the breaking out of the bondage of confining shackles. The instrument of destruction can be seen as a twofold symbol of the conflict involving freedom and bondage within Dyar, and, by reversion, within his creator, Paul Bowles. Bowles is still in bondage—unconsciously so—to the stern, puritanical father and must punish repeatedly those erring figures of his creation. At the same time, the creative process, embodying as it does its unacceptability to the father, persists in total defiance of the father's expectations for his son. For Bowles, every creative work, originating in his brain ("that warm, humid, dangerous breeding-place for ideas" [LICD, p. 285] that was destroyed in Thami) frees him [Bowles] from bondage. Hence the importance of the fragmented double for Bowles. By displacing his unacceptable thoughts onto his protagonist, Dyar, Bowles succeeds in expunging that in the unconscious which is too painful to deal with; in addition, Thami must be killed, because "the slaying of a different

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ego—an unconscious illusion of the splitting-off of a bad, culpable ego, satisfies the need in the hero to protect himself permanently from the pursuits of the self . . . it is really a suicidal act"<sup>12</sup> To save himself, Dyar, paranoid, must kill Thami, even though, paradoxically, in killing him, he destroys himself. In effect, Dyar embodies a human conflict, for which there exists no resolution. In the words of the chilling final image, "He sat down in the doorway and began to wait. It was not yet completely dark" (*LICD*, p. 292). In his bleak metaphor for the human condition, Bowles holds out very little hope for modern man.

While Bowles's cosmic vision is dark, a saving grace lies in art. *Let It Come Down* provides release for Bowles from psychological bondage, so that he can continue to create—satisfying the need within him to be both artist and avenging angel.

<sup>1</sup> Theodore Solotaroff, *The Red Hot Vacuum* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bowles, *Let It Come Down* (Santa Barbara Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 36. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *LICD*.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1974), p. 116.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rogers, *The Double in Literature* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> As quoted in *ibid.*, p. 4, from Hanns Sachs, *The Creative Unconscious* (2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951), pp. 343–44.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, *Paul Bowles*, p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Jay Shir, "Truth and Verisimilitude," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 20 (1967–68), 254–56.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Bowles, *Without Stopping* (New York: Putnam's, 1972), pp. 10–17. Subsequent references are cited parenthetically in the text as *WS*.

<sup>11</sup> Millicent Dillon, *A Little Original Sin* (New York: Holt, 1981).

<sup>12</sup> Otto Rank, *The Double* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1971), p. 76.

